



21st Century Leadership: It's About Time

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The Leading Edge Forum team and 35 clients are just back from a fascinating and inspiring study tour of Seattle and San Francisco, led by my colleague David Moschella, visiting the digerati (Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Amazon), venture capital organizations Andreessen Horowitz and Madrona Venture Group, and a bunch of great startups. It was a real education in the bleeding edge of technological possibility, focused around Machine Intelligence. Lots of opportunities. Lots of risks.

As Leading Edge Forum and others continue to regale CIOs and other digital leaders with tales of opportunity, risk and change in the 21st century, one question inevitably pops up: Where do I find time for all this new stuff? Time to investigate it. Time to synthesize it into strategic plans. Time to implement it.

In a satisfyingly recursive twist, investing in becoming a more digitally savvy human and executive can free up a little time to research matters digital. Every time I hang out with my colleague Lewis Richards, I get hints and tips on how to automate various aspects of my work and personal life with things like IFTTT¹.

But digital efficiencies notwithstanding, we need to constantly re-evaluate how we as leaders use our time. Budgets, projects, operations and services are all somewhat fungible; the one constant is time. We cannot make more time, so the key is to apportion it more smartly. So, how do you apportion your time? How do you make sure you stick to your plans for your time? How do you avoid getting drawn into the tactical issues of the day? Is your use of time evolving appropriately? Pete Goss, round-the-world sailor (who I frequently co-present with at Oxford University's CIO Academy) says that the first job of the ship's captain is to get to the point where, if he or she happens to fall overboard, there will be no day-to-day impact on the running of the ship. In our context, the CIO must aggressively delegate the day-to-day, in order to free themselves up for strategic sensing, thinking and planning.

We suggest investing a little effort in implementing a method of monitoring your use of time. One very simple – yet deceptively powerful – technique is Michael Bungay-Stanier's three-way split: Bad Work, Good Work, Great Work². *Bad Work* is work that, in an ideal world, you wouldn't have to do. It's fundamentally a waste of time – expense reporting is a good example. *Good Work* is the work that you were hired to do; that you are good at and know how to do; that others expect of you; where you are a 'safe pair of hands'. *Great Work* is work that is a stretch for you; that fuels your passion; that challenges you; that you learn from. Consider colour-coding your diary: Red – Bad Work; Amber – Good Work; Green – Great Work. Then monitor the percentages.

Even better might be to analyze your use of time across multiple dimensions: bad/good/great work as one view; now/next/future as another; sensing/strategizing/implementing a third. This enables you to monitor whether you are focusing on the right kind of work and the right time periods appropriately.

Bad Work	%
Good Work	%
Great Work	%

Sensing	%
Strategizing	%
Implementing	%

Now (this year)	%
Next (2-3 years)	%
Future (>3 years)	%

1. If This Then That, <https://ifttt.com>

2. Michael Bungay-Stanier and Seth Godin, *Do More Great Work: Stop the Busywork Start the Work That Matters*, Workman Publishing, March 2010

There is, of course, no 'right answer'. No perfect ratio. Sometimes we have very challenging project implementations or operational issues that draw us into the 'now'. Sometimes we have talent gaps and issues that mean we have to focus more on our good work and sacrifice our great work. But if we believe that the next couple of decades will be full of disruptive change, we should aim to devote more time to sensing, more time to great work, more time to future planning.

As a starting point, it is paramount that we keep track of how we use our time, and that we feel it is evolving appropriately. We should also introduce this discipline to our team, and discuss goal ratios; these will inevitably differ for each role and each person.

Just as an aside – I came across a device called the ZEI³ on Kickstarter which might help with keeping track of time, and backed it!

Whatever happens, we have to find ways to consistently and reliably make time to sense, think, strategize and synthesize around new digital opportunities and threats. If we make them an afterthought, there is a good chance our jobs and our companies/government agencies will soon become afterthoughts too!

3. <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/timeular/zeio-the-most-simple-time-tracking-solution>

About Leading Edge Forum

Leading Edge Forum (LEF) is a global research and thought-leadership community dedicated to helping large organizations identify and adopt Next Practices at the growing intersection between business and information technology. We believe that as business and IT become inseparable, virtually every aspect of work and the modern firm will need to be re-imagined, and this creates exciting new digital opportunities.

Through an annual membership programme of research, events, onsite workshops and advisory services, we support Chief Information Officers and other senior digital business leaders in areas such as strategy, organizational change, executive education, talent development and the future of the IT function. Members enjoy personalized access to our global network of thought leaders, clients and leading practitioners.

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