

Wisely Invest in Your Most Precious Commodity— Your Time



By Donna M. Amaral-Phillips

Have you ever made the statement, I just wish there were more hours in the day or I already have more to do than I can get done? You are not alone; all of us get that feeling occasionally. Our time is our most valuable and precious commodity and cannot be replaced. Quoting the great philosopher, Seneca: “We’re tight-fisted with property and money, yet think too little of wasting time, the one thing about which we should be the toughest misers.”

Time management is one of those areas we rarely discuss, although we realize it greatly influences our dairy businesses and personal lives. I remember reading an op-ed piece where Dr. Nevil Speer, formally at Western KY University, stated: it is not about how you *spend* your time, but more importantly, how you are *investing* your time. If we sit back and think about it, spending versus investing your time have very different meanings and implications. To me, investing time refers to how you allocate your time versus spending your time refers to what you do with your time. In this article, I would like to deviate from my normal articles and talk about investments in time management and the potential rewards to not only dairy businesses, but more importantly to people and families involved in these dairy businesses.

Managing ones time starts with setting priorities and then completing these tasks in a timely manner. Setting priorities obviously entails deciding what needs to be done now, today, and those tasks that can be done tomorrow. Remember though, these priorities need to change with conditions or other factors outside our control. The best and often cited example revolves around the importance of timely harvest of small grains and other forages in the spring and getting corn planted. We all realize that timely harvest of forages can potentially result in higher milk production, more income and less expense, and ultimately more profit. However, rain or equipment breakdowns due to lack of maintenance can delay or at least change the best-laid plans. The key is to be prepared, i.e. have equipment ready to complete the tasks, and when conditions are right, be ready to complete tasks in as timely manner as possible and be prepared to change priorities or multi-task to complete several necessary and timely tasks. All of us procrastinate completing tasks, especially those we do not enjoy doing. I am great at procrastinating, especially when it comes to writing

“Time is more valuable than money. You can get more money, but you cannot get more time.”
Jim Rohn

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articles, even though writing is a major component of my job! I often have to tell myself, just sit down and write that article.

To better invest our time, we need to look for ways to increase the efficiency or simplicity of completing everyday tasks. Many times, we could find ways to decrease the time spent completing tasks with some very simple or easily implemented changes, which improve efficiency. These changes could be as simple as where various feeds or supplies are located so they are more readily available. Another example could involve redoing feeding systems for heifers and dry cows. Instead of stepping inside a gate to a feed trough and walking through the mud to feed dry cows or heifers, these cattle are fed at a fenceline feeding system potentially decreasing the amount of time spent on this task. This frees up time for other tasks needing to be completed. Saving 5 minutes here and there can quickly add up over the day.

Spending time to train and then delegate and trust employees and family members to complete various tasks can help improve your time management. For this to work, people need to understand why they need to complete tasks in a certain way in addition to how to complete the task. With this training, they should be able to complete the task in a timely fashion and deal with minor daily inconsistencies, but not cut corners. To organize tasks needing to be completed for the day, a short meeting with all involved can help increase your time management. Too many times I have been on farms where numerous employees come up to the owner and ask or are instructed what to do next. Just think of the time this farmer could have had, if they had delegated early in the day tasks to their employees and then could trust the employees to get these tasks done correctly and in a timely manner. Better yet, what if your employees completed their jobs with minimal direction from you, the farm manager. Not only will this approach free up time for you to get things done, but also you will have more time to think about running the farm as a business, not just the tasks associated with farming.

Sometimes the best time management practice is trading a few dollars and delegating a task to someone else. This trade can be in the form of an hour a month for a routine task, such as completing record keeping needed on a dairy, to outsourcing tasks, such as manure hauling or purchasing hay or premade grain mixes. This trade can free up time, which can be used to complete other necessary tasks, spend time with family, or just allow one to better manage your dairy.

Improvements in time management not only influence our dairies or dairy-related businesses and how we complete tasks, but also impact our personal lives. Freeing up just 10 to 15 more minutes a day may allow one to spend this additional time with our families and others that are important in our lives or pursue hobbies that allow us to deal with the stresses of everyday life. In the professional world, this concept is referred to as “work-life balance” and revolves around balancing these two important aspects. However, the only way we can do both of these justice is to think of ways we can better invest our time and incorporate these time management practices into our daily routines.