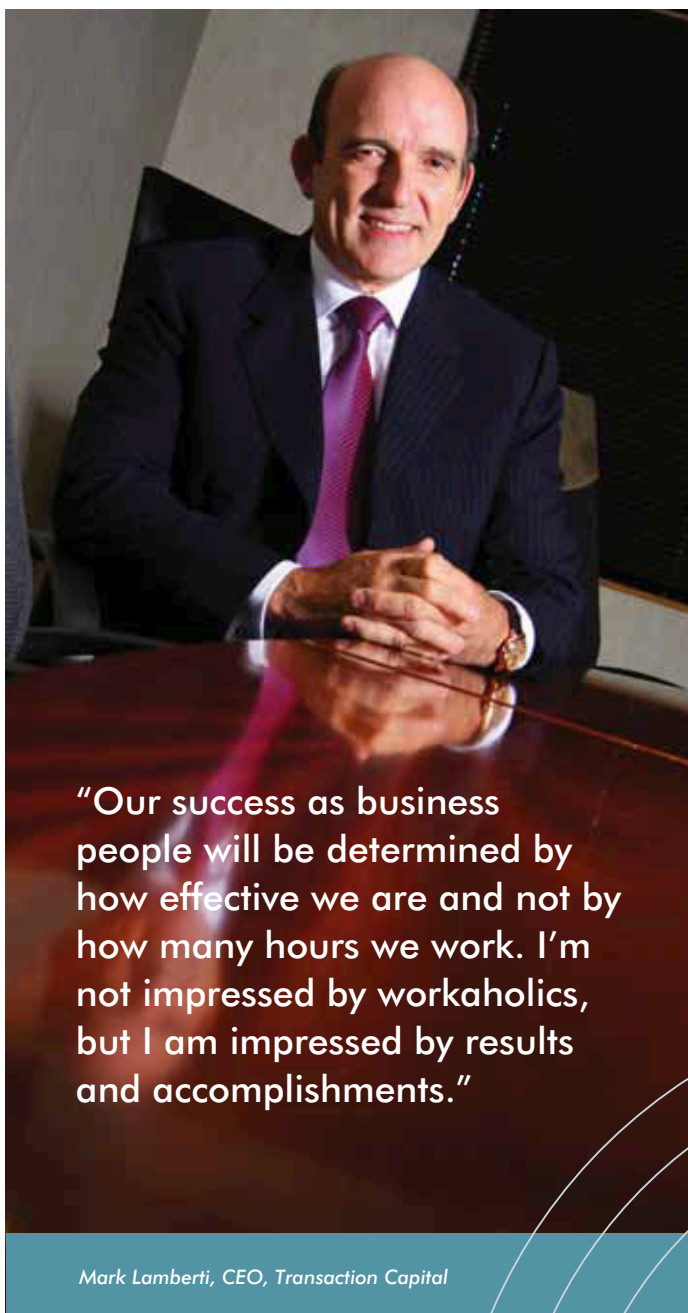


It's your life...

says CEO Mark Lamberti



"Our success as business people will be determined by how effective we are and not by how many hours we work. I'm not impressed by workaholics, but I am impressed by results and accomplishments."

Mark Lamberti, CEO, Transaction Capital

"Time management" what a mindless expression. We all know that we cannot manage time; the clock keeps ticking no matter what we do. There is only self-management. How we spend every minute is our choice, and all of these choices add up to become our life.

That's quite a scary thought. You have decided to read this article. Whether you remember it or not, the four minutes or so that you spend reading this have become part of your life. Four minutes that will never be repeated. Four minutes less of your time left on this earth.

Sometimes we are totally free to make a choice. We think to ourselves, "I have a free half hour, should I go for a run, read my book or watch TV?" Often we are not totally free to make a choice, but it is still our choice. We tell ourselves, "I need to support my family and I choose to be at work by 8am" or "I would like to play golf with my friends, but I choose to spend the time at my child's soccer match." Sometimes our freedom to make a choice is taken away, like when bad weather prevents us from having a day on the beach and we choose to use that time differently.

PLANNING

helps us distinguish
between the urgent
and the important

There are 8 766 hours in a year. Most of us use about 2 550 of these sleeping, another 920 bathing, dressing and eating and 370 of these hours traveling to and from work. That leaves us with 4 926 hours a year. The question is: how well do you prepare for and plan the 1 960 normal working hours? And, what choices do you make with the rest? If you do the arithmetic, you'll see that you still have to choose what to do with 2 966 hours per year and that's a third of your life!

So your life is the sum of all your decisions about how to spend your time. When we say "she has a full life" that normally means "she is making choices to do many different things with her time". When we say "life is boring", we are really saying "I have made the choice to do the same things over and over again". What is it that causes us to make these choices and why do some of us seem to be better at using our precious hours than others?

Two major factors distinguish the good time users from the rest.

The first is that effective people define themselves. They have thought deeply about who they are, what they want to accomplish and what roles are most important in their lives. When faced with a choice of what to do with their time, the decision becomes easy. Having defined themselves as a parent, they rearrange their schedule to attend their child's school play. Having defined themselves as a healthy person, they exercise regularly. Having defined themselves as a spouse, they schedule time for communication and activities that renew the relationship.

Unfortunately, when it comes to defining ourselves within our work life we can easily fall into a trap. Our work is very important. It provides our livelihood, it gives us a sense of purpose and we can find meaning and satisfaction in developing our skills and using our talents. We take our work seriously because we value the opportunities it affords us and we have an obligation to do what we are paid for. We also give our best and do more than is expected in the hope that our contribution will result in improved remuneration and career prospects. Herein lies the trap. It has become fashionable to boast about how hard we work and to use work as an excuse for us "not having enough time" to devote to other equally important parts of our life.

The reality is, however, that our success as businesspeople will be determined by how effective we are and not by how many hours we work. Our results (outputs) matter much more than the hours we work (inputs). Personally, I'm not impressed by workaholics, but I am impressed by results and accomplishment. Of course there are times when we simply have to work long hours, but if this continues for too long we have to question our efficiency.

This leads to the second factor that all good time users understand. To be efficient you have to plan. All of us can think of something we need to do urgently in our working lives. But planning will help us to distinguish between the urgent and the important. And the undeniable truth of business life is that the more we focus on

the important things, the less urgent things will take up our time. Dealing with customer or client queries requires us to be urgent. But unless we tackle the important task of fixing the cause of the queries, they will continue to waste our time. Giving a decision to one of our direct reports may be sufficiently urgent for it to disrupt our day. The way to prevent this is to undertake the important task of teaching that person to make the decision themselves. The urgent report takes less time if we invest in the important task of learning to type.

So when next you feel overwhelmed and decide that the problem is your time management, ask yourself two simple questions: have I defined myself clearly? and do I plan the use of my time? Your answers to both will determine whether you are on top of your job, whether you and your spouse can enjoy some time alone together this weekend or whether you can give your undivided attention to the five-year-old about to ask you a very important question. The choice is yours.

Thanks for using a part of your life to read this. ■

