



Time is a measurement against which we assess ourselves and others and we use it every day. But time is inflexible. It is unbending. It is time. Once gone, we can't get it back. Once wasted, it can be recaptured.

Advice



By Caryn Walsh

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We Fijians are a wonderfully easy going and caring people and our gentle nature and relaxed atmosphere is highly regarded around the world amongst tourists and visitors who have the privilege to visit Fiji. The land of emerald blue sea, large coconuts, brilliantly coloured frangipani's and tantalising food, Fiji is a premium holiday destination for tourists around the world, particularly Australians and New Zealanders. And as it is one of our greatest sources of revenue, we need to make sure that as individuals, teams and organisations, we do everything we can to keep the tourists coming to visit us. To relish in our shores, to enjoy our hospitality and to, even briefly, be fabulously Fijian in their holiday experience. Regardless of the business we run or in which we work, we need to consistently think about whether we can work smarter, not harder, to stretch our goals and make our mark. To keep the tourists coming. Working smarter makes our lives easier all round and is particularly relevant when we think about customer service and how we can maximize our time and what we do to make sure that the xperience holiday makers have in Fiji is optimal. Time is a key consideration in every business. Because time is all about efficiencies, productivity and profit, if we don't use it well, it

Why 'Fiji Time' Can Cost You Your Business

CONSIDER THESE USES OF TIME:

- To work out if we are late, early or running on schedule
- To determine our age and that of things around us (buildings, statues, etc.)
- To assess if we are successful or not and to work out how well we have done
- To set goals and achieve those things in life we want to
- To look back at history, for example, and accurately determine what occurred in any historical time frame and how it impacted the world (the second world war from 1939 to 1945 is an example)
- In business, to implement and live by deadlines, to complete projects, to make profit and to implement strategies to be resourceful and successful
- To determine career paths and development activities of our people and grow them according to the needs of the business.

works against us. Time is a measurement against which we assess ourselves and others and we use it every day. But time is inflexible. It is unbending. It is time. Once gone, we can't get it back. Once wasted, it can be recaptured.

Fijian time? African time? Australian time?

In business, there is no such thing. There is only time. I was born and raised on the beautiful continent of Africa, where we enjoy 'African time.' Supposedly a relaxed and easy-going approach to life (like Fiji time) I remember once when this relaxed approach almost resulted in a company I was working in going out of business.

Why Fiji time can reduce your business outcomes and profit

We had to submit a proposal for a government tender worth millions of dollars to the company. A manufacturing organisation, much of its revenue depended on government funding so winning a tender was key to its long-term success. On this occasion, two project managers had not prioritised the completion of the proposal and because of their 'relaxed' African time ap-

proach (which means we'll get to it when we can) we missed the tender submission date deadline. The tragedy was that it affected the organisation considerably. Three hundred and fifty people had to go home, profits plummeted and for four years the company struggled to recuperate – and it didn't need to happen! Why? Because a respect of time, a sense of urgency in business, prioritising what had to be done by a deadline, was not taken seriously. And once time has gone, it's gone. We can't get it back. If you allow 'Fiji time' in your business to become the 'norm' and accept late submissions and less than exemplary outcomes, you could be playing with your organisation's future. Two months ago, I wrote an article in this column about tolerating mediocrity in your business. If you don't deal with it appropriately with consequences and by making people accountable and responsible at all levels, it will keep occurring. One day you will wake up and bingo! You have a culture of mediocrity.

5 minutes late is as bad as 60 minutes late. Late is late.

Business is an interesting concept and in many ways, mistakes can cost an organisation big time! And with competitors yapping at your heels, you must do everything you can to be at the front of the race. The first cab off the rank. And this includes respecting time. Nine o' clock is 9:00 not 9:01. If you are expected at a meeting at 9 a.m. — any time after that is late. Unacceptable. You waste the time of people waiting for you, the organisation's money, and potentially its future.

Get everything done at least 15 minutes in advance.

In fact, get to every appointment 15 minutes early, ready and waiting for the start of the meeting. This is particularly important in leadership where part of your role is to model exemplary behaviour for others. If you are late, don't expect your people to be early. You get what you model. If you must deliver a paper to your boss on Friday at 4 p.m., then it cannot be received any clater than Friday at 4 p.m. That is the nature of business. 4:01 p.m. is late, 3:45 p.m. is better. Time is time and in business, it must be honoured or it can cost you.

Two years ago, I was asked to attend a meeting at a company in Fiji. The meeting started at 4 p.m. and was attended by the CEO, the HR director, a junior member of staff and myself. The junior member had called the meeting to present a paper to the three of us. Three senior people in the room interested in learning about a new perspective from a younger team member. I was excited. By 4:45 p.m. (45 minutes after the start time of the meeting) the CEO, HR Director and I were still waiting for the junior person to arrive. I was furious and left the meeting, whilst the other two waited, even though I asked them not to. Just before 5 p.m. (almost one hour late) the junior member arrived. The CEO was naturally annoyed, but there was no consequence for the junior member's late behaviour. Nothing at all. So the behaviour is condoned.. Allowed. And continues. Imagine the waste — how much money was wasted by three senior people waiting for an hour? How many other productive things could they have been doing in that time to help the company grow in other ways?

Rules of leading a business around time

If you accept mediocrity, you will get more of it. The more lateness you allow, the more you will get. The more you get, eventually you get a culture of people arriving late and not adhering to deadlines. The more people ignore the critical nature of time in business, the more inefficient and unproductive they are. The more unproductive and inefficient your people, the less productive and efficient your business. Then you lose good people, profits drop and the very existence of your business can be threatened. Time in business is everything. Do you respect it or allow it to be overstepped?

Get serious

Whether you're a leader or a valued team member, it's critical to take time seriously, for all the reasons outlined in this article. If you don't, then your competitors (who do take time seriously and manage it well) will gladly take your paying clients off your hands.

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