

# Maximize Your Free Time—and Your Productivity

John J. Demboski, CFP

I'd like to share with you the best ideas I've utilized in my practice that have allowed me to attain Top of the Table qualification for the last two years and, more importantly, to take 12 weeks of free time with my family each year. I'm so grateful to have the opportunity to share these concepts with you because it finally allows me to pay it forward. You see, these ideas really aren't mine. I've been drinking from the MDRT wells of priceless information and practice management strategies that have been dug by the likes of my mentor Jim Chapman, as well as Tony Gordon, Ian Green, Guy Baker, and so many others. To the extent you have any questions or would like to get a copy of any of my practice management tools, I want you to feel free to give me a call or send me an email. My contact information is listed in your meeting booklet.

Early on in my career, I quickly realized that if I did not find strategies to carefully manage my time and energy, I'd never attain the ambitious goals I'd set for my business. Now it's important for you to know that my goals are not entirely based on financial objectives. My three objectives are:

- Spend time with my family being present in their lives
- Make a significant impact on this world
- Create a world of financial security and abundance for my family

While of course I want my family to live in a world of financial security and abundance, it's really a much higher priority for me to: 1) spend time with them, being truly present in their lives, and 2) make a significant impact in this world through the selfless serving of others by helping them to clarify and attain their financial objectives. So the strategies that I'm going to share with you today have allowed

me to attain or exceed those three objectives each and every year—global recession or not.

I'll start by articulating why and how I designed my time management system. Then I'll go over the various tools, explain why each component has been so critical to the attainment of my goals, and then, hopefully, we will have some time for questions.

You can probably identify with this. You start off your day with a vision—a vision or a hope or a dream—of all that you're going to get accomplished today, in the next 8 to 12 hours. And then the reality of playing a critical role in this world sets in—the urgent emails, calls from the panicked, concerned, or happy clients, the underwriter wants more information to underwrite the case you've just submitted, your staffing team that is supposed to be saving you time keeps interrupting you throughout the day to get your input on this, that, and the other, the compliance department calls and wants to go over whether the right boxes were checked on the application, and then your spouse calls and needs to vent about the latest problem with your mother. Bottom line: You look up and your whole day is gone. You have no idea what you've accomplished and can only hope that, somehow, tomorrow you'll be able to get the things done that you'd planned to accomplish today. Who can relate?

You see, this is a universal issue. It's universal because the work we do is incredibly important. The bottom line is that too many people need our expertise. This is a good thing. No actually, it's a great thing! The problem arises because it's extremely challenging to stay focused throughout the day when so many people need our guidance and you care enough to want to prioritize helping them over accomplishing your own agenda of objectives for the day. The bottom line is that



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you care more about your clients than you care about taking care of your own priorities. But alas, there is hope. Through the use of a couple of simple tools, you'll be able to create successful daily habits, and you'll find that you're able to stay motivated and accomplish all of your objectives.

So in designing my time management system, I relied heavily on a couple of different resources. The first resource is the *MDRT Productivity Guide*. This book was the result of the MDRT Bottom Line Committee. The committee analyzed MDRT members and drew conclusions about what it takes to be productive and successful in this business.

From this guidebook, I took away the critical importance of carving out and allocating a significant amount of time to sales activities while I'm in the office.

- Qualifying: 13 Hours, 27% of time
- Qualifying and Life: 9 Hours, 19% of time
- Court of the Table: 22 hours, 48% of time
- Top of the Table 25 hours, 52% of time

It's pretty clear that if you want to attain Court of the Table or Top of the Table levels of productivity, you'll need to spend approximately half of your time engaged in sales activities.

If you can productively spend your time engaged in sales activities, then you'll be able to sell more (help more people) and do it in less time, thus freeing up time to be home with your family. And last, but not least, make more money.

Number of hours worked, average income per hour:

- Qualifying: 2,115; \$52.48
- Qualifying and Life: 2,074; \$93.38
- Court of the Table: 1,978 (% fewer hours worked); \$147.62 (% higher income per hour)
- Top of the Table: 1,892 (% fewer hours worked); \$296.51 (% higher income per hour)

Right about now you are saying, "Great John, so you're telling me that if I spend more time selling, good things will happen?" Not rocket science, but stay with me.

It's so much easier said than done. I propose that you already know what it is that you need to do to be productive beyond your wildest expectations; you're just not doing it. Why not? Why haven't you already exceeded your goals?

Energy. You lack energy and motivation. If you had all the energy you needed, you'd be doing all the things you know that you need to be doing, and you'd be productive throughout the day. I may look like a financial planner, but in reality I am an overly qualified motivational speaker. Just like you and me, our clients mostly know what they need to do to put their financial affairs in order. Our clients simply

don't have the motivation or energy to take action. So if we can all agree that our success has a great deal to do with how well we are able to motivate our clients and prospects, then it stands to reason that very few things could be more important to your success than you yourself staying high energy and motivated. How in the world are you going to motivate anyone to take action if you are lacking in motivation yourself? So instead of calling my system a time management system, I'll be referring to it for the rest of our time here today as an energy management system.

This brings me to my second resource in the design of my energy management system. Tony Gordon's book, *It Can Only Get Better*. From this book I took away several priceless quotes that have been extremely influential in the creation of my energy management system. The first quote relates to the importance of discipline.

The difference between success and mediocrity is simply this: Successful people discipline themselves to do the things that mediocre people don't like to do. I'm not saying that successful people like doing what the mediocre don't enjoy, they just discipline themselves to do those things. Even though they don't enjoy them any more than the less successful do. Our job itself is not difficult, it is *making* ourselves do the job which is hard. . . . I'm sure this applies not just to our business but to life itself. After all, if we cannot discipline ourselves to do what is needed TODAY, what right do we have to assume we will be capable of doing what is required tomorrow, or next week, or next month or next year. If we control TODAY we are in control of our lives and our futures.

So in other words, if we want to set goals or objectives that will lead us to the life of our dreams, it has to all start with being able to exercise complete discipline and control over what you do today. Tony's book created a pivotal moment for me in the realization that I could control my whole future if I could just control my energy today. If I set daily goals and create successful habits that keep me high energy throughout the day, I'd be able to accomplish any goal I put my mind to. Now you're thinking, "Wow that sounds like hard work," and you'd be right. After all, if it were easy, everyone would be able to attain Court of the Table or Top of the Table production levels. The reality is that it is going to take the

courage to believe that you can accomplish it, and then the discipline to actually do today what needs to be get done.

So please don't get the mistaken impression that setting daily goals will be easy. Actually it is quite the opposite. You see, setting daily goals means that at the end of every day you'll have either succeeded or failed for the day. You've either moved one step closer to accomplishing your objectives or moved one step backward. Having daily goals means that you'll face the possibility of failure on a daily basis. Setting daily goals takes courage and discipline. But if you have the courage and the discipline, what you're going to find is that your energy is about to go through the roof. It's a snowball effect. The daily acknowledgment of your accomplishment of your goals in turn creates a tremendous amount of positive energy. With that positive energy that's been created, you'll be even more energized and motivated for the next day. Then, when you track your success at the end of that day, you get an adrenaline hit from yet another day of having moved closer to your objectives. And on and on like a snowball rolling down a mountain picking up momentum and energy.

So before I move onto my third resource, I'd like to recap just so that we are all on the same page. We perform a critical role in this world, living a life of great significance, dramatically altering our clients lives for the better. But because of this, we often have more demand for our time or our energy than we have supply.

If we want to attain Court of the Table or Top of the Table production levels, we are going to need to spend about 50 percent of our time and energy in sales activities such as meeting with our clients. This ideal allocation of our time creates a strain due to the aforementioned demands for our time or our energy.

Just like our clients, we know what we need to be doing to attain our objectives; we simply lack the energy and motivation to do those activities. And it's no wonder we lack energy and motivation; it's very difficult to stay high energy and motivated when you spend a large portion of your day motivating others to take action. In order to accomplish your objectives, you are going to have to develop ways to stay highly energized and motivated throughout the day.

You'll need to learn how to master your activities and energy one day at a time, which will again take courage and discipline. But if you can't control your activities for the day, how in the world do you think you can control where you'll be in a year?

Seriously, let me take a moment to let the gravity of what I've just said sink in.

If you can't find ways to control your day, today, you will never be able to control where you will be in a year. You can spend all the time and money in the world buying all of the best software and have the most effective highly trained staff, and it will all be for naught if you cannot control the expenditure of your energy on a day-to-day basis.

The solution to maintaining high energy and thus, attaining all of your goals is to hold yourself accountable to the accomplishment of daily goals. The adrenaline rush from the daily accomplishment of your objectives will reenergize and motivate you on a daily basis, creating a snowball effect of accumulating and accelerating energy.

Putting this into practice (no pun intended) leads me perfectly to my third resource, Ian Green's book *The Financial Advisor: How to Be a Successful Practitioner*

Ian's book outlines an outstanding plan for managing your energy and time during the day. I've based my energy management system very closely on his success plan that entails two major parts: first, keeping track of your time throughout the day in 15-minute increments by color coding your day into categories of how that time and energy was spent, and second, keeping a daily numerical score of sales cycle activities. At least 90 percent of the design of my energy management system is a direct result of Ian's work/design outlined in his book.

Okay, so what I'll do here is start off at the beginning of the day, talk about the tools I'm using and why they are important to me, and offer some suggestions on how to maximize your results.

So first things first. I get up at 5:30 a.m. This allows me to be at my desk just before 6:00 a.m. You may have to get up earlier if you live farther than a few miles away from your office. Getting an early jump on my day allows me have some quiet time. I use this quiet time to perform a few critical activities that prepare me for my day, today, of success.

First I take a moment to read through my positive affirmations while I have a cup of coffee. This is my number one tool.

It's a list of thoughts and perspectives that I've come across over the years that have a special significance to me. These affirmations get me in the right state of mind so I can, and will, accomplish all of my objectives not only for today, but for life. I encourage you to start your list today. Just write down a few sentences about why you're important in this world, who loves you and why, and motivational quotes. You get the idea. When you read this list, you should feel yourself gaining in energy, and you can't help but smile.

Next, I visualize my day. I think through exactly how the day's activities are planned. For each appointment I think through exactly what I plan to accomplish for the client—brainstorming potential questions or alternate solutions that could come up in my meeting. You'll be surprised how you think of missing parts to your plan or other solutions that you'll think of after having a night to sleep and allowing a visualization of the meeting from start to finish. By the end of my visualization process, I know exactly how each meeting will begin, what questions may be asked, and exactly what steps I plan to walk the client through so that we end up at the logical solution or course of action. Contrast that start of the day to hurriedly bustling through the door at 8:00 or 9:00 a.m., trying to figure out what is going to happen next, dodging and weaving at challenges as they come at me. By starting my day early, I am creating an environment that will be conducive to my success.

I also allow a few minutes of silence in that morning time. Much has been written over the centuries about the power of silent contemplation. I take a few minutes to simply watch the fish in my reef tank. It relaxes me greatly and is a terrific way to refresh your mind and energy. Spend a few minutes watching the fish or the crabs, and you can just feel your blood pressure start to drop. Create your own silence ritual if you don't already have one. It will be immensely energizing.

Then when the sun comes up at about 7:00 a.m., I go for a run—usually three to five miles—a hard enough workout to really sweat and get the adrenaline pumping. Obviously, check with your doctor before starting any new routine, but I've found that a strenuous workout gets me primed for my day of high-impact energy. Getting in a great workout every single day will dramatically boost your energy levels. There is likely no other single more important activity you could do than getting in a hour of exercise.

When I get back to the office, it's about 8:30. My team, which arrived at about 8:00 a.m., had some time to settle in. We then go into our morning meeting. This time is blocked out in my calendar every single day. My team knows that they are going to have my full attention from 8:30 to 9:30. No distractions, no multitasking—they have my full attention. This is important because when I started my energy management system, I knew that I would have to develop a way to efficiently and effectively manage the time and energy constraints that my team requires from me daily.

Time with your team is not sales activities. In fact, that time is cutting into your day and into your ability to accomplish your daily goals. It's likely one of your worst time

and energy consumers. Think about how many times a day your assistant rings through or drops into your office to ask you for help or guidance. Carving out an hour each day to handle all of their questions from the previous day, and handing off all of the tasks you need completed during that one nonproductive hour is an efficient and effective use of their time and yours.

Oftentimes we fool ourselves into thinking that if we just handle the issues as they come up, we will be providing our clients with outstanding service. But in reality doing things in piecemeal, as they come up, often multitasking to get it done quickly, results in our clients getting a fraction of the time and attention their needs truly deserve because we made the subconscious decision that immediate results are superior to time-efficient, well-researched, and well-thought-out results.

I propose that it is much better to coach your clients' expectations so that they understand you have taken ownership of their issue. You will be blocking out time in your schedule to properly handle the matter and will be back in touch with them in the next 24 to 48 hours with the best possible solution. What client would argue, "No John, actually I'd prefer for you to stop doing what you are doing. Please perform a half-hearted, likely shortcut and multitasked research of my problem, and give me a quick worthless answer"? Never. What our clients really want is to get the problem off of their desk and onto yours. Please don't mistakenly interpret that to mean that you have to solve it immediately.

So I handle staff and client issues one time per day—from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. Now of course there are going to be circumstances throughout the week when there really is an emergency that necessitates an immediate solution, but that should be the exception, not the modus operandi day in and day out. So of course it goes without saying that I'd never check my email or answer phone calls.

The end result is that my team is happier because they know when they will get my full, undivided attention. They know that I will not be interrupting them throughout the day to hand off tasks (so they can focus and work effectively as well), and my clients are more satisfied because they have well-thought-out solutions to their problems.

Okay, tool number two gets taken out at this point of my day. I have a 8.5" x 11" day planner sitting on my desk. Next to the day planner are markers for me to color code how my day is spent. This tool is a critical component of my energy plan, as this is the tool that both reminds me of my daily objectives and helps me to keep track, or keep

score, of how well I am progressing throughout the day at accomplishing those objectives. Daily goal number one is an ideal allocation of my time to sales cycle activities, and daily goal number two is to hit 30 points of sales cycle activities. I'll now go into both of these energy-creating objectives in detail.

I'll go over the point system first. The point system is based on the sales cycle that we all have to go through. First you make a call or email, and for that I get one point. Then you have a conversation, and for that I get two points. Then you book a meeting, and for that I get three points. Then there is a meeting, and I get four points. If there is a sale in that meeting, I get five points. And for each prestige recommendation the client gives to me, I'll collect another five points. Every day I have to hit 30 points. If my score is less than 30 points I have failed. I am not on track for meeting my objectives and, believe me, I don't like to let that happen. Since I can get 30 points by making 30 phone calls, there should be no reason I would go home at the end of any day having not scored my 30 points.

As I go through my day, I make hash marks on this sheet, keeping track of my progress. I like to leave the office right at 5:00 p.m. sharp, so if I've not made good progress by 2:30 p.m., I know that I need to really focus and buckle down. The point system really is easy and fun to track, and it really feels great when you're part of the way through the day and you've hit your 30 points.

It's important to note that this point system is very flexible. How you collect your 30 points will vary from day to day. Some days I'll just be making phone calls, and I'll need to make about 30 phone calls to hit my target. If I can get through to some of those people, then I'll get points for speaking with them and more points if I'm able to set an appointment or even potentially more if I can get a referral or make a sale during that call. What I've found is that if I can just get 30 points a day, the production, whether it's from calls or sales, will just take care of itself.

The next part to this tool is the time management color-coding system. This aspect creates presence of mind to not lose track of time as I go through my day. I have a loud clock on my desk that chimes every 15 minutes. When that clock chimes, I color in how I just spent the last 15 minutes. Now, if I'm in an appointment with a client, I obviously wait until the meeting is over to record my time, but otherwise I discipline myself to keep good track of my time—all the way from 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Now let's take a look at the energy management section in more detail. There are six colors of time and energy utilization.

Green is sales cycle time. This is time when you're earning or scoring points, and you are, most importantly, utilizing or spending the bulk of your energy. As you know, you'd ideally spend 50 percent of your day doing sales cycle activities to hit Court of the Table or Top of the Table. This activity is the most valuable use of your time and is where you'll earn 100 percent of the financial and emotional rewards that come from our business. I hold this time dear because it is the lifeblood of my business. Ideally I'll spend three to five hours a day in green time. I love to color in my time spent as green.

Blue is financial planning time. This is the necessary evil use of my energy. Technology can help us make this time as efficient as possible. So by all means, invest in staffing and technology that will allow you to reduce your time spent in this area. Huge increases in time can be attained with relatively small investments in relation to how valuable freeing up green time can be. Whenever I'm coloring with my blue marker, I'm thinking, is there a way I could be doing this more efficiently? I'd like for this time to be two to three hours a day maximum.

Orange is practice management time or marketing. This is the time throughout your day where you are wearing the entrepreneur hat. You are running your business. Some of this time is valuable; most of it is wasted in my experience. Obviously, you have to spend time managing your business, but I'd argue that day in and day out is not the right time to be doing it. Ideally you want to get outside of your practice, outside of the day-to-day obligations—like when you're here at MDRT. This is great orange time. From day to day, I love to spend a total of two hours: one hour for the morning team meeting and one hour for handling other business management tasks throughout the day.

Red is tied with the green time for most important. Red is time spent strenuously exercising, not strolling. Sweating! For me it's critical to spend one to one and a half hours daily. Any less than that (if I get too busy to go and work out) and I know I am off track and will not be attaining my goals because I am going to run out of steam.

Black is administrative time. This is time when I am doing tasks that I could and should be paying someone \$20 to \$30 an hour to do. Ideally I'd spend no time at all doing these tasks but, at most, a half hour per day. Every half hour I spend doing these task I'm effectively lighting a couple of \$100 bills on fire. If Top of the Table production is about

\$900,000 of annual income, and you have about 2,050 normal work hours a year, that equates to approximately \$440 per hour. If you're capable of doing tasks that generate \$440 per hour, how could you ever justify not paying someone else to do it for \$20 to \$30 an hour?

Brown is personal time. This is non-business related time during the business day—taking a call from the spouse, checking your email, calling a friend, updating your Facebook status. I am a big believer in working hard and playing hard. I took over 12 weeks of vacation time last year, 10 in 2009, and 8 in 2008. Basically last year I took off one week per month, and if you recall, it is one of my top three objectives to spend quality “present” time with my family and loved ones. But please don't fool yourself—time wasted dinking around online is simply wasting precious time and energy that could have been used or directed toward truly productive time or as quality family or friend time. I try to spend less than a half hour each day in brown time. Quick, maybe a five-minute call to my wife, five to ten minutes dinking around online really should cut it. I bet you'll be amazed at how much of your day is consumed by brown time.

At the end of every day I tally up my hours spent in each category and get an adrenaline rush of excitement. When you know that you've done what needed to be done to be on track to accomplishing your goals, or as Michael Kelly stated last year on the annual platform, when you're becoming the best version of yourself is when you discover true happiness.

It's infectious—your team, your clients, your family, everyone around you will sense your confidence and enthusiasm. You'll have an abundance of energy.

So tool number three is really just an organizer or benchmarking tool for your daily worksheet. At the end of the day I put my time sheet in one of my team member's box. She then takes the data and inputs it into an Excel document. This document is critical in that it allows me to track my progress in becoming more effective with my time and energy management. I can now go back and compare week to week, month to month, or year to year, going back to 2009 when I first implemented the program.

I know that this year I'm going to have my best year ever—not because I set a goal for the year and I hope that somehow I'll get a big case or two that will help me out, but rather because I *know* I am making daily tangible progress toward accomplishing and attaining my three goals. If you have the courage to set daily goals for yourself, you'll discover that with discipline and a few simple tools, you can unlock your limitless supply of energy and motivation to propel you to new heights.

If you take one thing away from our time here together today, I'd like it to be this: You are entirely in control of your future—no one else. Nothing can hold you back from accomplishing your objectives—not the economy, nor the markets, nor the regulators. If you take actionable, measurable steps every day, nothing can hold you back. The future is yours to seize!