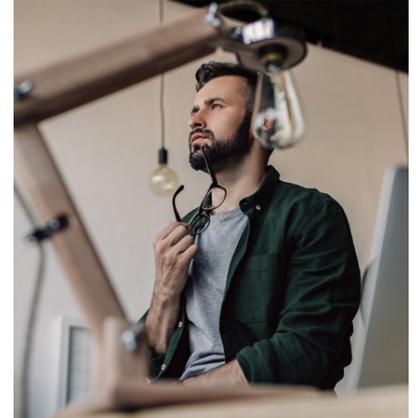


Executive Time

-Mark Haeussler

I am a proponent of being available for your employees, as it has the potential to increase cohesion, spontaneity, communication, and a sense of commitment. The open-door policy has been widely advocated to bring people and ideas together in the moment. The practice became highly rated, and some organizations strongly encourage open doors at nearly all times.



You may sense a “but...” coming, and here it is: While the “open-door” approach supports a certain positive environment, it may overvalue what can be accomplished as an outcome compared the cost. Because leadership time is accounted for as a fixed cost (an annual salary), it is not viewed with the same accountability as, say, fuel is for an airline. Airlines do not waste fuel. Do you, and possibly others on your team, waste its fuel of executive time?

Executive time is expensive. Executive time best prioritizes building a future over solving past and current problems. In reviewing your overall time usage, how much time falls into those categories and where a shift may be warranted. Appraise your historic available time and compare where it is now and appraise where you would like it to be (it may be more, it may be less). What needs to shift? Where is the door too open?

Remember, being available also means being interruptible. Molecular biologist John Medina, in his book, *Brain Rules*, tells us this: “Studies show that a person who is interrupted takes 50 percent longer to accomplish a task. Not only that, he or she makes up to 50 percent more errors.” Executives benefit from blocking available time in support of those they lead, and in blocking *unavailable* executive time for creativity, problem-solving, analyzing, and contemplative space.

Be sure to communicate when implementing more boundaries. There may be no less overall time where you are available to others, but it may have more structure to it. If saying no for a time request in the moment is something that you find difficult, then reframe it from “not now” to a later time. Create a lexicon of how you and others can best communicate boundaries so that when a valuable interruption comes along, either for its urgency or to leverage a creative moment, the team knows what words can express the needed outcomes.