

Interruptions vs. Opportunities

My plan for today lasted almost halfway through the morning.

I sat down at my desk just before 8:00 AM, pulled up my task list, and started my daily planning and prioritization process. By 8:05, I had everything slotted into place. If you'd called and asked me what I planned to be doing at any particular time of the day, I could have told you.

From 8:05 to 8:30, I answered emails. Then three coaching calls, half an hour each. After that, I'd planned another half hour to get some coffee, return a couple of phone calls from yesterday, and deal with anything that had come in while I was on my coaching calls. After that, I had planned to sit down and write this, budgeting an hour and a half for the task. But it's now after 4:00 PM, and I'm just sitting down to start writing. What happened to the plan?

No Plan Survives

There's a maxim in the military which states that "no plan survives first contact with the enemy." The practical application of that is simply that you plan based on what you know now, and then change your plan based on what you learn later. Here's the first key point for today: *If your priorities change, your plan must change!*

So let's talk about my priorities as of 8:05 AM. The three coaching calls were at the top of my priority list. Why? Because they represent a delivery commitment on my part. Coaching is one of my products. It's exactly the same situation as when you promise to deliver a print order by a certain time on a certain day.

But wait, there's often some "wiggle room" in your delivery commitments, right? Yes, you committed to this morning, but you might still be OK this afternoon. The same is true with my coaching calls, and there have been times when I've asked a client if we could bump our call to accommodate my schedule. But, and here's the second key point for today, *any time you have to ask for more time, that has potential to stress a relationship. It is not a step to be taken lightly.*

New Priorities

So what happened between 8:30 and 10:30 to change my plan for the rest of the day? First, let me tell you what happened that *didn't* alter my plan. I received four phone calls and 22 emails during those two hours. I didn't answer any of the phone calls, just let them go straight to voice mail. It turned out that three of them were robocalls anyway. The emails were a similar ratio of junk to quality. During my "catch-up" block, from 10:00 to 10:30, I deleted 15 of them, answered 3, one of which ended up being a back-and-forth email exchange, and set 4 aside for later.

I also returned the non-robo phone call, which turned into the most significant alteration of my plan. It concerned a proposal I'd written several months ago, and later been told that they were "going in a different direction." As of today, they still liked that direction, but had decided against the consultant they had originally chosen. So, could I provide that scope of work, and would I write up a new proposal for their consideration? And could I have it to them by the end of the day?

Let's go back to the 4 emails I set aside for later. They were things I needed to address, but not now. In other words, *interruptions*. The consulting proposal, on the other hand, felt like an *opportunity*. So I deviated from my original plan and got it done.

Did I win the job? Don't know yet. Did I use my time wisely? I think so. Bottom line, I put my time into an opportunity rather than into interruptions. And that leads to the third key point for today: *Know the difference!*