

Ask a Busy Woman

by Helen Kornblum

When my sons were in elementary school and my life was steeped in PTA and community volunteer work, my friends and I used an expression whenever we needed another warm body to take on a new project. “If you want to get something done, ask a busy woman.” The underlying assumption, that busy women knew how to absorb more responsibility and to deliver what they promised, usually held true. No matter what age and stage we are in our lives and careers, we still recognize the women (and men) who undertake big responsibilities with gusto and never disappoint their colleagues.

What is the secret of the busy woman? Beyond her personality and motivation, a busy woman knows and uses certain techniques of time management and scheduling that make her efficient and effective. You can use them, too.

* A busy woman knows her priorities. Her involvement with her children’s school and extra curricular activities is deliberate because she wants to participate in ways that are meaningful to her. Despite her apparent involvement in many activities (whether she has children or not), she is also capable of saying “no” when asked to join, support, or lead a venture that does not suit her inclinations or her talents. This trait serves her well in the business world where she keeps a steady vision of her mission from which she does not waver.

* A busy woman plans her time. The tool—blackboard, paper calendar, electronic device—doesn’t matter, but her insistence on tracking her time and having a sense of purpose does. She knows how she wants or needs to spend her days and can keep her productive hours free from interruptions, unless she decides that it’s best to adjust plans. She is firm yet flexible.

* A busy woman doesn’t fill up every hour of the day, knowing that she’ll need to have time for unexpected events or opportunities. Her intuition and creativity help her decide when it pays to reorganize her To Do list, at least temporarily.

* A busy woman doesn’t procrastinate. She looks at the project realistically, breaks it down into manageable tasks with a series of small deadlines that make accomplishment easier. Embedded in this process is her willingness to make decisions and delegate or outsource when other expertise is needed. She doesn’t have to do everything herself, which gives her the benefit of collegial interaction.

* A busy woman is a good communicator who makes her needs and expectations for each project known. She doesn’t expect others to read her mind and she encourages the exchange of information in mutually respectful ways. Because she gives of herself so readily, people around her respond positively to her needs.

Busy women aren’t trying to be our role models, but their time management and organization skills are instructive. Personal and business success is linked to habits of

mind and behavior. If you can develop or strengthen some of these traits in yourself, *you* will soon be perceived as a busy woman who knows how to get things done.

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