

How Productive Business Leaders Spend Their Time

6 min read



Key Takeaways

- People who work up to even 70 hours accomplish no more than the individual who puts in 55 hours.
- Based on a 50-hour workweek (That's better than 62-hours right?), you should spend about 20 hours on your business's future, vision-casting. Dedicate roughly 15 hours of your workweek to executing your business strategy.
- Give yourself a little over an hour every workday to monitor your key performance indicators (KPIs) provided by your latest financial management reports to analyze and identify where to adjust your business drivers.

Time is a finite resource for everyone. (So, we'll try to keep this article short.) For business leaders, this precious resource seems to dry up even faster.

According to a study from Harvard Business Review ^[1], the average CEO puts in 62.5 hours each week! That's more than 50% above the normal 40-hour workweek, and the same study showed that CEOs work at least one day most weekends and continue working throughout their vacation days.

This reflects the enormous amount of dedication CEOs have to running their companies, planning for the future, learning the numbers, anticipating challenges, and looking for new opportunities to ensure both their business (and personal) success, and the success of their employees.

As every business leader knows, each hour spent on company time marks an hour of personal time sacrificed for the company's greater good.

Isn't It Better to Work Longer Hours?

Putting in long hours feels like you're giving everything to your job. However, working longer hours isn't actually better for anyone, including the company.

Research ^[2] from economist John Percival at Stanford University has proven working more than 50 hours per week, causes a person's productivity to greatly decline. Beyond 55 hours, the work *essentially* becomes fruitless, **as people who work up to even 70 hours accomplish no more than the individual who puts in 55 hours.**

But what if we told you that you can be just as productive without putting in more than 50 hours per week? What if you could use your limited time smarter? What would your future look like then? Heck-what would your weekly schedule look like then?

You can reduce your workweek by working smarter – not longer.

Consider the following breakdown to learn how to better allocate your time to become a more effective CEO in fewer hours.

4 Ways to Become a Better Business Leader in Less Time

1. Future Planning (about 40%)

Based on a 50-hour workweek (That's better than 62-hours right?), you should spend about 20 hours of it on your business's future, vision-casting. During this time, you should plan for your company's future. Ask yourself questions like- " What does our future forecast look like? What are the company goals and what decisions do I need to make to drive them in the right direction?"

With an outward focus, **set-up if-then scenarios to help you foresee potential challenges**, estimate the likelihood of their occurrence, and identify the corresponding pivots your business might need to make in preparation. Consider where your immediate resources should be invested: research and development, operations, personnel, expansion, or somewhere else?

Use this time to foresee essential future personnel needs. What mid-level or high-level positions might exist in your company's future?

[Think about which current employees you value.](#) Imagine which employees could step into future roles and how you can avoid the need to hire in a pinch by beginning to prepare them for their future roles now.

2. Execution of Business Strategy (about 30%)

Dedicate roughly 15 hours of your workweek to executing your business strategy. Use this time to understand or help identify the objectives that everyone should work toward that fit into the overall operational goals. Encourage your employees to develop individual goals that align with their team goals, that align with company goals. These are called [cascading goals](#), and **are a crucial part of a lean business model.**

Setting these benchmarks and implementing motivational and incentivizing human capital strategies will generate [high-performing teams](#). It helps to point your entire business (at every level) in the same direction, toward bringing you closer to the ultimate vision of your company in the future.

Additionally, avoid having too much of your time monopolized by too many one-on-one meetings. Schedule weekly team meetings so there is consistency in streamlining the problem-solving process. Don't waste this time on topics that could be resolved in an email. Rather, use this time to gain insights into the operations of your company.

Having proactive, regularly scheduled one-to-one meetings, with your most valuable executives instead of reactive ad hoc meetings will make your time more productive. Use this time to talk about their issues, concerns, getting alignment, and of course the good things happening with them and their teams.

3. Analyzing and Adjusting Business Drivers (about 15%)

Give yourself a little over an hour every workday to monitor your key performance indicators (KPIs) provided by your latest [financial management reports](#) to analyze and identify where to adjust your business drivers.

Management Accounting is the processes and procedures that create the financial insight to aid management in strategic decision-making. KPIs are a great way for business leaders to gain insight on specific areas of their business

This reporting is focused on segments of the business. By segmenting, you can get into the details and analyze the drivers of your business.

Once you've become accustomed to this routine, you'll be able to glean invaluable information, at a glance, and make decisions to improve cash flow, productivity, and operations and increase profit margins.

4. Professional Improvement (about 15% + any remaining time from above)

This time (about an hour each workday) should be spent improving yourself, your leadership skills, and [fine tuning your business acumen](#). Set aside a few minutes for meditation and reflection. Use this time to think about your role and what you could do better or how you would like to improve to become a [successful CEO](#).

Keep yourself up to date with current events by reading books, blogs, articles, and even taking in media that's outside your normal purview. **This will give you insight into others' experiences and help you view the past, present, and future from a different perspective, which can be incredibly valuable to a person in a leadership position.**

Download the latest articles or books in audio format, and you can spend this time listening while getting some exercise to keep your body and mind in good shape. A healthy CEO is certainly more effective than an ill one.

Don't forget to spend time (like the time on an airplane or during your commute) relaxing, unwinding, or doing something else you enjoy – just for the fun of it! This will keep you refreshed and mentally balanced. When you spend time away from pressing problems, you'll be surprised by how effectively your subconscious untangles even the most complicated issues.

Improve Time-Management with Management Accounting

In the third point above, we described how the insights revealed by your company's KPIs and management reports can help you determine how best to allocate the time you spend focused on the future in addition to your company's current operations.

Without these reports, you'll find yourself reacting to problems rather than proactively steering your company around pitfalls toward success.

With the right financial insights you can identify the most profitable revenue channels to determine where your resources will be most fruitful. You can foresee upcoming challenges and make decisions now to prepare for or avoid pitfalls altogether.

With financial acumen, you can improve your time management while improving your margins and cash flow to lead your business into the future – without working yourself into the negative place.

Go forth now and plan to make better use of your work time, while also building in personal time for yourself to be the great leader you are meant to be!

[1] <https://hbr.org/2018/07/how-ceos-manage-time>

[2] <http://ftp.iza.org/dp8129.pdf>