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Technology Tools to Aid in **Effective Communication**

One of the keys to effective communication is that it must be timely. Informing your residents that the water will be shut off the day after it happens, or an entire month before it happens, is ineffective because it is not a well-timed message.

To ensure your communications are managed in a timely manner, you must be efficient and organized. Yet, many fail to utilize the available tools to help us manage our daily responsibilities and communications. Let's review some best practices for organizing, planning, prioritizing and efficiently managing your daily duties so you can communicate effectively.

(While many of the tips in this article refer to specific software and email as a means of communication, the fundamentals can be applied to other systems and communication methods.)

Getting Organized

A lot of the anxiety, frustrations and stress in our lives are created by not managing our time well. Proper time management doesn't just happen by circumstance – it takes effort.

The first step in getting organized is to determine where you're currently spending most of your time and effort, and more importantly, where you can be more efficient. While MS Outlook has a "Journal" functionality that could be used, I find it too cumbersome to be useful – I'd recommend a simple time journal. It doesn't have to be complicated; the simpler, the better.

Monitor yourself in 15-minute increments for a few weeks. I would recommend tracking this for both your work and personal time, which will highlight opportunities to be more focused, an ever-increasing challenge in today's world of remote work.

Use key questions to analyze the results. Here are some sample questions, though you can use your own as you see fit:

a. What activities can be eliminated?
b. What can be delegated to someone else?
c. Where can I create efficiencies in what I'm doing?
d. What am I doing that wastes other people's time?
e. Where am I mixing personal & work commitments?

This will help you summarize areas where you can improve your time management to stay more organized,

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PROJECT PHACE

thereby helping you be more efficient with your communications.

Planning

Planning is a critical part of being a successful condominium manager. "Failing to plan is planning to fail" is especially relevant when communicating effectively. Many recurring communications must be sent by a manager – AGM notices, PICs, board packages, resident notices, etc. Each has a different schedule, so when we don't properly plan for these events and their related communications, we are constantly reactive and risk missing something.

Using the calendar in Outlook to plan for these ensures your planning is directly linked to your primary communication source (email) and is available remotely. Tips for effectively using your calendar include:

- Schedule your annual & monthly communications. You may not know precisely when your AGM will be held, but you should know when you will have to start planning it.
- Schedule fixed commitments such as meetings and time to prepare for those events. For example, there is no excuse for being caught unprepared for a Board meeting that is pre-scheduled in your calendar.
- Make a mental note of your high & low energy times of the day and use them to your advantage. Block off high-energy times for optimal creativity, such as crafting communications, and schedule meetings during your more idle times to stay productive.
- Beware of little things that use precious time, such as responding to emails, and schedule blocks of time for these quick tasks to help stay focussed.
- Learn to use your digital calendar's features, such as automatic reminders, so you don't miss anything.

Prioritize

Calendars are great for long-term planning and more time-consuming items but are inefficient for smaller tasks. There's no sense wasting time adding every 5-minute job to your calendar – this is where the task or to-do list comes in.

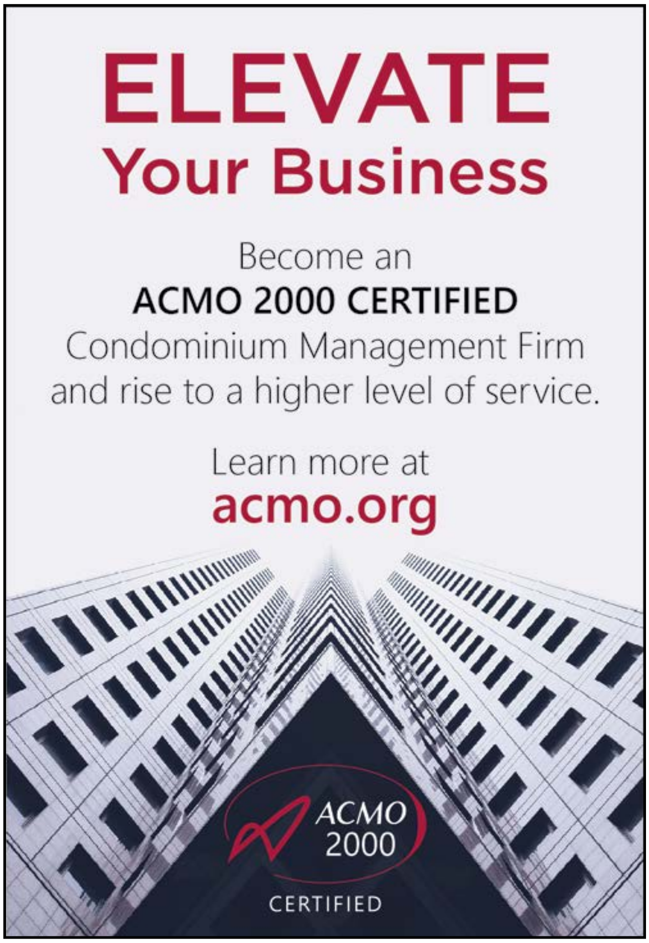
There are several options available, including the functionality in MS Outlook. Using the tools bundled with your email and calendar does have the advantage of easy integration for features such as flagging emails. However, the relatively simplistic features may not be robust enough for some users. Check out the Apple or Google Play store if your task list needs additional details or options. In fact, there are so many available that the challenge is finding what works for you.

(A note of caution: I would recommend against using your calendar as a dual appointment scheduler and task list, as it's far too easy to "carry things forward" that you didn't get done today. Likewise, be careful about using your email inbox as a task list – there is a tendency to lose track of older emails and lose focus by constantly reviewing and re-reading emails.)

The Eisenhower Matrix

The Eisenhower Matrix is more of a method to organize your tasks than a specific software, though some apps are built around this concept. The idea is to categorize all your tasks based on importance and urgency, so for a property manager, it may look like this:

- Items in Quadrant 1 are both urgent and important, so you should do them immediately – perhaps responding to a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flood in your building, for example.

- Quadrant 2 items are important but not as urgent, so you should schedule a time to get these done, possibly even transferring these to your calendar. Communicating about your fire safety inspection is certainly important, but if you plan for it properly, it won't become urgent.
- Quadrant 3 items are your less important items that have specific deadlines – for example, your meeting minutes for the board. Where possible, delegate these items to someone else.
- And Items in Quadrant 4 are neither urgent nor important, which begs the question – why is it on your tasks list at all? (That being said, remember that just because something isn't important to you, doesn't mean that it's not important to someone else).

Your focus should be on Quadrant 2 to complete tasks before they become urgent (Quadrant 1). If you're always working in Quadrants 1 & 3, you will never be efficient, not to mention you will always feel under pressure. Quadrants 3 & 4 may be the "easy" tasks to accomplish, but they aren't where your focus as a manager should be. Even within the individual Quadrants, tasks need to be prioritized so you can accomplish the most important goals on your list.

Email Focus

We've reviewed how to get organized (time tracker), plan (calendar) and prioritize (task list), but what about the other big elephant in the room… email! Effective email management has become increasingly challenging, especially in remote working environments and with a significant increase in volume, so here are some strategies to stay focused and tackle your emails.

- Turn off your email notifications (sounds & pop-ups), so you can focus on the current task at hand and do it well. Resist the temptation to monitor your email constantly. Check it at set points throughout the day to balance productivity with responsiveness.
- Keep separate work and personal email accounts. It's too easy to lose focus when you mix the two.
- Create a folder structure to file your email appropriately. Your goal is to keep your inbox organized so you can be efficient and not re-read emails multiple times.
- Learn how to set email rules to file and organize your incoming emails automatically. (Be aware that this may result in multiple inboxes or folders to check if you automate unread emails from somewhere other than your inbox.)
- Take advantage of email flags and reminders to avoid reviewing old emails to see what you have and have not completed yet.
- Make use of custom categories to make emails easier to review and sort. This may mean one folder per client or perhaps one folder per project. Categories in Outlook are customizable, so you can use them as you see fit to meet your needs.

Most importantly, find a happy medium between staying on top of your email and letting your email become a distraction. Following the 4 D's of email, management can help to ensure your inbox stays organized so you can communicate more effectively. For every email, decide if you need to:

1. Do it. Act immediately, either because it is urgent or it would be inefficient not to do so.

2. Delegate to someone else. Where possible or more practical, delegate appropriately.

3. Defer. This involves appropriately utilizing your calendar or task list.

4. Delete. Let's face it, many of the emails we get are unnecessary.

Hopefully, the above suggestions will help you stay organized so you can accomplish one of your most significant responsibilities as a property manager – communicating effectively. ■

Jeff Lack is the Vice President of Communications and Technology for Wilson Blanchard Management, An Associa® Company (WB). He is responsible for the company's CRM & accounting systems, communications, internal operating systems and technology solutions for WB's team and clients. Before joining WB in 2004, Jeff worked in public accounting as an audit manager for a mid-sized firm for eight years. From 2017-2022, Jeff was an instructor for the "Financial Planning for Condominium Managers" course through ACMO and now teaches the "Condominium Management Financials" course through Humber College as part of the CMRAO licensing requirements. wilsonblanchard.com

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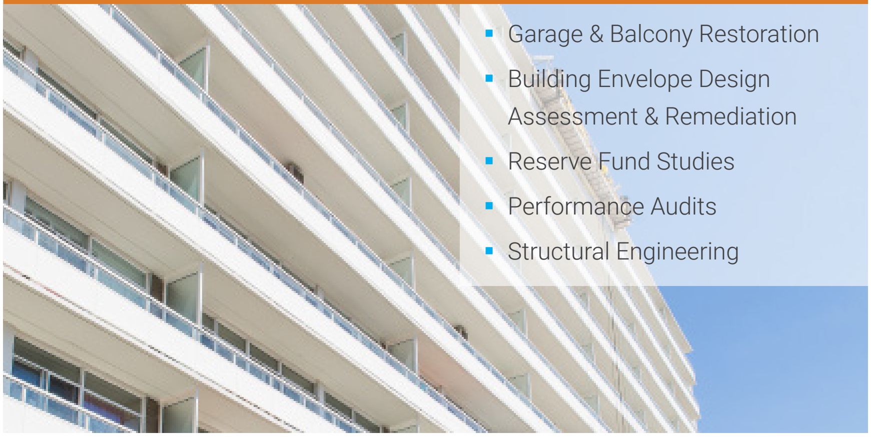

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