

What's the best use of a leader's time?

I asked this to 1,000 managers, founders and executives from all over the world. Here's what they said.



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Time is the one constant we are all given. No one gets more or less of it than anyone else.

As leaders, it's how we spend our time — what we choose to prioritize, and what we choose not to do at all — that reveals what's important to us, and determines our team's outcomes. If we want to figure out how to be an effective leader in the workplace, we must start with examining how we spend our time.

As a CEO myself, I've personally wrestled with this. I've had weeks where I've had fires to put out, meetings to show up to, business development calls to make, interviews to hold... Before I know it, the week is over, and I'm looking back at it thinking, "What the hell just happened? Where did my week go? Is that really where I wanted to spend my time?"

As a result, I decided to pose this question, "What's the best use of a leader's time?" to our online leadership community in Know Your Team, The Watercooler, with 1,000 leaders from all over the world. The answers were remarkably consistent.

Based on Watercooler members' responses, there seemed to be three areas that leaders should focus their time on...

Recruiting + Hiring

Your team's success hinges on the people you choose to hire. Surely, this is an obvious statement — and yet we forget about our role as a leader to drive these efforts. As a

leader, you should be thinking strategically about who you want to contribute to your culture and help get your company to where you want it to be. What kinds of non-negotiable values must they have? What diversity of ideas and backgrounds should they have? Then, you should actively work to attract and recruit those folks to your organization. How are you showing that you run a company worth working for (e.g., your company's marketing, you speaking at conferences, etc.)? How often do you meet new people outside your network, to connect and passively recruit folks who may be great to work with in the future?

As a leader, you also set the standard for what matters when hiring: the skillset, the values, the experience. You say when it's time to hire — and when it's not. Naturally, depending on the size of your company, you may have a hiring team helping you out with this. But regardless, your voice in this process as the leader is essential. It's too important for you not to be spending your time on it.

Considering your team's long-term strategy, vision, and culture

Admittedly, focusing on the long-term view of the company is hard to do. Especially, when there seems to be so many immediate needs for the company to take care of...and, when we're not so sure about the long-term view of things, ourselves! But thinking about the long-term strategy, vision, and culture of the company is critical because, well, no one else is doing it. Literally, it is no one else's job in the company to be thinking about the long-term, be it six months, a year or two out, or ten years down the road — other than you, as the leader. In particular, considering the long-term vision is paramount, because a company's vision is where the most fundamental source of motivation for your team is derived. If you're not spending time designing and adjusting a long-term vision — a picture of a better place — people won't be motivated to do work to help get the company there.

Communicating the direction to everybody all the time

Communication is the easiest thing for leaders *not* to do. After all, it's quite a repeated, draining slog to keep saying the same thing over and over again. Despite this, many members of the Watercooler emphasized that you cannot communicate enough as a leader. Why? You can't expect your team to know anything unless you communicate it. And, depending on the size of the organization, it usually takes some time for a message to sink in or a for a decision to be thoroughly explained. Knowing what's going on and where a company is headed is how people do their best work. People can't perform well without the context and information to do so. If you're not constantly communicating what people should know, the context isn't there and people can't do their job.

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These three areas are what our Watercooler members said are the best use of a leader's time. But how about for *you*? Do you find yourself spending time in these areas as a

leader... or not?

Sharing these three areas prompted even one member of the Watcrouler to reflect and write about how she plans her week. I encourage you to do the same.

Our capacity to improve as leaders expands when we evaluate how we spend our time.

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P.S.: This was originally published on the Know Your Team Blog. If you enjoyed this piece, please feel free to share + give it 🧠 so others can find it too. Thanks 😊 (And you can always say hi at @clairejewell.)

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