



## Paring down to-do list should be No. 1

[By Michael Kinsman]

Just about every morning when I get to the office, I draw up a list of things I want to accomplish that day.

Some are simple tasks that I need to get done that day and can't afford not to. A few are bigger, pressing tasks that seem important for an immediate goal. Still others are longer-range issues that I want to do some background work on in hope of making some headway in bringing them to fruition.

Then, you probably are familiar what happens.

The phone starts ringing with demands coming at me from all directions.

Unexpected e-mails arrive with time-sensitive demands.

The boss stops by with something to add to my list.

By the end of a good day, I can cross about half the things off my list. Tomorrow's list will grow when I carry over the incomplete tasks.

On the worst days, I will cross off one or two to-do items and go home feeling like I failed no matter how hard I worked that day.

I suspect I am not alone in this. But the point is that the world is changing faster than most of us can adapt, and the longer we resist that or stay locked into our dated notions of how we should be approaching our jobs, the further we are likely to fall behind.

"The everyday barrage of tough and demanding business problems consumes leaders; it drenches them with distractions, stress, and the morphing needs and ills that

require even the best to move faster than hummingbirds," says Lisa Haneberg in her book "Focus Like a Laser Beam."

"But humans are not hummingbirds, and they can't work around the clock to keep up."

Even if each of us were highly efficient, Haneberg says, keeping up with the machinations of business today is like trying to race with the speed of light.

Instead of getting swallowed by our work, Haneberg contends we need to look at what we do, why we do it and our adjust our work to target our most crucial business needs.

In other words, we need a sharper focus.

Among her suggestions are:

- Weed out the essential job tasks from the nonessential.

Haneberg asks that we evaluate how individual tasks contribute to achieving our most important goals, which tasks improves effectiveness and whether anyone notice if we don't do certain tasks.

"When you change how you view relevance, you can quickly see which tasks are of marginal value," she says.

- Redefine success and determine what's important.

You might not realize that your game plan no longer targets the kind of results you want

out of your work. You have to make sure that each member of your work unit knows how you have changed strategic direction and how that affects what they do.

- It is better to do five things well than 10 things poorly.

Rid yourself of the idea that the more items you cross off your to-do list each day, the better you are at your job.

Haneberg suggests refining and scaling down the to-do list, making sure that each task is essential to the overall goal. She suggests that you take the one great goal you have for the day and put it at the head of the list.

Frankly, many American workers and their managers are baffled by how they will meet the demands of the future.

Too many of us are trying to adjust to the past by using practices and techniques we've developed through the years. Some are effective, but others are outdated and inefficient as competitive pressures evolve and require more.

Maybe we just need to step back, take a close look at the way we are approaching our work, streamline our tasks to make sure they are all essential and the job will be a little easier today.