

# MUSICIANS' TIME MANAGEMENT BASED ON THIRD HABIT OF STEPHEN R. COVEY

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**Abstract:** The article deals with an issue of time management of professional musicians. This issue was investigated due to a theory presented by Stephen R. Covey in a third habit in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, especially the matrix of time management. The study presents the results of case studies based on questionnaires and research interviews.

**Keywords:** time management, musicians, Stephen R. Covey.

## 1. Introduction – the theory of self-management in time according to the third habit by Stephen R. Covey

The requirements of the contemporary market has now embraced the professions which have been customarily included in the artistic milieu (Pluta, 2013). Outstanding works or art or talented artists have encountered problems with reaching through to a wide group of recipients, if their project is not supported by adequate promotion and management. Artists are therefore forced to employ properly trained partners to care for the marketing and financial parts of their activity. Otherwise, artists are forced to acquire adequate competences themselves (including establishing their own business, by which they are transformed into entrepreneurs), without neglecting their primary work which is to nourish the creativity that comes with their profession. The abundance of tasks and issues to be resolved requires proper planning. Time management is a part of this planning.

The issues of time management and self-management were described in literature devoted to management sciences (Bieniok, 2010; Raffoni, 2010; Rogusznik, 2010; Wieprzycka, 2013; Allen, 2016). Planning, organization, motivation and control, which are the basic functions of management, are often considered in temporal categories. In this respect, notions derived from project management (Lock, 2013; Olejniczak, 2014) or logistics (Łapuńska, Pisz, 2014) can prove helpful, together with many other aspects related to management. A plurality of positions, combined with the fact that there are new issues being released on the market, accompanied by

the reissues of old publications devoted to time management and self-management in time and targeting both scientists and specialists in management, as well as practicing managers and individuals who simply want to raise their effectiveness and counteract procrastination, proves that this subject is still valid, sought by a wide group of recipients, as it offers a broad theoretical and practical dimension.

This article will raise the issue of time management and self-management in time (Wojtoszek, 2014), as exemplified by the widely understood musician profession. This term encompasses instrumentalists, vocalists, music theorists, event managers or teachers working as educators in public and private schools, specialists working in cultural institutions, musicians performing various jobs (e.g. instrumentalists, orchestra musicians, hired soloists, cultural event managers), or any other entrepreneurs providing musical services.

The issue will be presented in the light of Stephen R. Covey's theory, as described in his *7 habits of highly effective people* (Covey, 2016), which has been quoted in many a theoretical and practical study devoted to the subject of time management (Randak-Jezierska, 2013; Wieprzycka, 2013). In his book, first published in 1989, Covey describes the third of seven habits in terms of a time management matrix, according to which tasks are classified according to their importance and urgency. Classified in this manner, activities are ordered in four quadrants of the matrix. The first task group are important and urgent tasks, the second one – important, but not urgent, the third one – not important and urgent, and the fourth one – are not important and not urgent (Table 1). The matrix itself and the classification of tasks according to their importance and urgency are based on a matrix developed by the 34<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower (Randak-Jezierska, 2013; Sierpińska, 2013).

**Table 1.**  
*Time management matrix according to Stephen R. Covey*

<b>Important</b>	<b>Quadrant I</b> <b>Important/Urgent</b>	<b>Quadrant II</b> <b>Important/Not urgent</b>
<b>Not important</b>	Quadrant III Not important/Urgent	Quadrant IV Not important/Not urgent
	Urgent	Not urgent

Source: Covey, 2016.

Tasks classified in the first quadrant are “crisis situations”, such as, for instance, deadline driven projects or pressing problems requiring immediate resolution. The second quadrant includes, among others, preventive measures, planning, finding new opportunities, or building relationships with spouse or partner. Activities assigned to the third quadrant can appear to be important and urgent, but they are ultimately not as important as tasks classified in quadrants I and II. The last, fourth quadrant includes activities that bring nothing to the table. These are the so-called “time-wasters”, such as certain telephone calls or correspondence (Covey, 2016; Randak-Jezierska, 2013).

According to Stephen R. Covey, tasks from the second quadrant are the “heart of effective self-management”, since they contribute most to accomplishing subsequent goals, and thus

facilitate personal growth. To ensure effective self-management, one needs to pursue the maximization of time “spent” in the second quadrant by minimizing the amount of tasks from the remaining quadrants. To do this, one needs to avoid important and urgent tasks and crisis situations which require immediate reaction by establishing a correct hierarchy and planning and prevention, one that is characteristic to the second quadrant. Tasks from the third quadrant should be considered and, depending on whether it is possible to delegate them, they should be assigned to suitable people, or dismissed completely. In turn, tasks from the fourth quadrant can be eliminated completely.

It is probably not possible to devote one's entire time to tasks from the second quadrant, as one can never anticipate all urgencies and accidents, crises, unexpected orders or tasks. There are also times when tasks from the third quadrant need to be categories as well, since, due to their form, they can appear equally important or urgent. Plus delegating tasks sometimes requires an investment of time in explaining the new responsibilities. According to Stephen Covey, this is worth doing, as the end result is a significant increase in effectiveness and satisfaction in one's life (Covey, 2016).

The purpose of this article is to present the notion of time management by musicians, applying assumptions of this theory. Specific tasks, needs, barriers and methods of perceiving the importance and urgency of tasks attributed to professional musicians will be identified with the use of research tools, i.e. a questionnaire and research interviews. The article will also answer a question whether musicians' understanding of issues related to management is shaped similarly to Stephen R. Covey's description of the third habit.

## **2. Research methods**

Eight professional musicians whose artistic experience is the basis of their gainful profession, or without which they would not be able to fulfill their professional responsibilities were invited to examine the notion of time management by musicians, based on the theory presented in Stephen R. Covey's third habit. The study undertook to verify whether professional musicians classify their tasks according to the matrix proposed by Stephen R. Covey, and whether important but not urgent activities are deemed the most important according to the third habit theory. The second research assumption was to check how the distribution of responsibilities would look like for the respondents according to the matrix proposed by Covey, and whether it would differ from the current state, as diagnosed. Apart from this, the purpose of the study was to define the tools used by musicians in their self-management in time, and to describe professional musicians' approach to delegating tasks – these aspects were also included in the third habit described by Stephen R. Covey. A questionnaire supplemented by a research interview was selected as the research method. The choice of these methods stemmed

from the fact that, implementing a case study and detailed interviews with each respondent, it was possible to gain insight in the motivations, the exact understanding of the theory of self-management in time, to identify specific tasks and activities with each respondent, and to prioritize them (which would be much more difficult, if not impossible in the case of extended questionnaires themselves). This way, the study referred to the factual time management methods employed by musicians following Stephen R. Covey's theories.

All respondents are between the age of 25 and 45. They were selected to achieve the highest diversity in terms of education, forms and places of employment, and career development. Attention was also paid to the reliability of the respondent and the possibility of verifying the information obtained from them. The musicians participating in the study are characterized by the following features:

- Respondent A – instrumentalist, doctoral student, lecturer at a public school, co-worker in a non-public institution.
- Respondent B – instrumentalist, student of a music school, runs their own business.
- Respondent C – instrumentalist, employee of a public institution, co-worker in a non-public organization.
- Respondent D – music theorist, lecturer at a public school, worker in a public institution.
- Respondent E – instrumentalist, student at a music school, co-worker in a non-public institution.
- Respondent F – instrumentalist, worker in a non-public institution, teacher in a non-public school.
- Respondent G – instrumentalist, student at a music school, co-worker in a non-public institution.
- Respondent H – vocalist, doctoral student, teacher in a non-public school, worker in a non-public institution.

In December 2017, each participant filled out a research questionnaire, in which the following issues were raised:

- Tool used in time management.
- Completion of the time management matrix with responsibilities attributed to the musical profession – current state.
- Estimation of time devoted to tasks from each quadrant – current state.
- Completion of the time management matrix with responsibilities attributed to the musical profession – “ideal” state which the respondent pursues or would like to pursue.
- Estimation of time devoted to tasks from each quadrant – “ideal” state which the respondent pursues or would like to pursue.
- Differences between the current state and the desired state.
- Delegation of tasks.
- Other comments and suggestions.

Apart from completing the questionnaires, the respondents also took part in interviews (in person, by telephone, or by online chats), in which musicians shared their views, problems, limitations, opportunities and plans regarding self-management in time.

### 3. Research results

A data analysis was carried out on the basis of the questionnaires collected and results accumulated.

Asked about the tools used to manage time, musicians listed calendars, in various forms (e.g. paper or online versions), paper task lists and post-it notes with tasks, attached in different places, task plans, smartphones, and even their own memory, on which they often rely. The paper calendar was the most recurring response.

Completing the time management matrix in the current state version, nearly all musicians placed instrument practice in the first quadrant. A vocalist included current repertoire practice in the first quadrant as well. Apart from these, this quadrant included such tasks as: didactic work, professional work, broadening knowledge and experience, playing concerts and attending rehearsals, overseeing accounting and administrative issues and replying to e-mails (these tasks were classified as important and urgent by the person running a business, i.e. respondent B), developing a new repertoire to be used in their profession, professional advancement, building a human relations capital, writing and publishing scientific articles (these tasks were indicated by the music theorist, i.e. Respondent D), learning for doctoral examinations and developing piano skills (the two last items were listed by Respondent H, a vocalist).

Quadrant II included such tasks as: preparing a new repertoire, searching for new partners for artistic projects, practicing the instrument (this was listed here by only one instrumentalist who did not place this task in quadrant 1), broadening knowledge, learning foreign languages, starting teaching practice, building motivation to take up tasks from the first quadrant, physical training, care for mental state and the quality of interpersonal relations, searching for scholarships, scientific work, learning the entertainment repertoire (this response was given by a musician who predominantly plays classical works, i.e. Respondent E), playing in chamber music assemblies, searching for new accompanists, preparing for remote competitions, concerts and tasks, and attending teaching and artistic courses.

Tasks presented in the third quadrant are the following: additional, voluntary classes and consultations with students, applying for scholarships, administrative, maintenance and logistics duties, settling formalities related to the organization of concerts, documenting the scientific activity, placing publications in open repositories, advertisement, reading, health and personal hygiene, scientific work, formalities related to teaching and classes conducted for gainful purposes, without any satisfaction or opportunities for professional advancement. What

is noteworthy, one of the respondents did not place any tasks in this quadrant (perhaps they were not able to name or identify them. However, in the next question, they noticed that they spent 10% of their time on tasks from this quadrant).

The last, fourth quadrant included: creating compositions and musical works, expanding the repertoire, sending out resumes to potential employers, scientific work, searching for scholarships, playing the instrument and listening to music for pleasure, non-direction allocation, searching for new business, artistic and scientific partners, spending time on watching online content, reading “snobbish” literature (i.e. popular literature, which does not contribute with any new knowledge), learning to maintain and tune the instrument, and observing the market of spare parts for instruments, copying and printing new notes, home-schooling students when the teaching schedule is overfilled, additional classes for students, conducted for the respondents’ own satisfaction.

Asked about the amount of time spent on completing tasks from individual quadrants, the respondents replied:

- Quadrant I – from 30 to 80%.
- Quadrant II – from 10 to 40%.
- Quadrant III – from 5 to 40%.
- Quadrant IV – from 5 to 20%.

Asked about the ideal distribution of the time management matrix, the respondents assigned similar tasks in quadrant 1 to those which they specified for the current state. In some cases, the list of duties from this quadrant was shortened (one of the respondents did not include any tasks in this quadrant). New tasks were added, such as stabilization of own duties. Tasks from other quadrants were also shifted there, such as reading or playing in chamber music assemblies. A similar approach was adopted for the second quadrant – what is noticeable, one of the respondents included searching for new gainful opportunities here, and another shifted playing the instrument and listening to music as a way to relax from quadrant four. The instrumentalist running a business, i.e. respondent B, reserved this quadrant for financial and accounting issues (he noted, however, that he was a realist and that this state was not possible). The person who did not list any tasks in quadrant 1 shifted the issues diagnosed for the current state from quadrant 1 to quadrant 2. Another instrumentalist would like to see practicing the instrument in the second quadrant instead of the first quadrant. The vocalist perceives practicing the piano similarly.

Three respondents would see no tasks assigned in the third quadrant. Among the remaining responses were: as is (three responses), searching for scholarships, entertainment and reading “snobbish” literature. In turn, as regarding the fourth quadrant, the first of the respondents shifted their professional work from quadrant 1, three respondents shifted their tasks here from quadrant 3, and another respondent added building a human relations capital here (this issue was not included in the factual state presented by the respondent). One of the respondents did

not place any tasks here, and another one limited them to one, compared with the three tasks specified before.

An ideal distribution of tasks among the four quadrants would be the following:

- Quadrant I – from 5 to 100%.
- Quadrant II – from 0 to 70%.
- Quadrant III – from 0 to 20%.
- Quadrant IV – from 0 to 20%.

Asked why the factual state differed from the ideal state, as presented by them, the respondent provided the following answers: employer's requirements (e.g. in terms of reporting), the need to perform certain activities in person (in an ideal situation, it would be possible to delegate them), out-of-work responsibilities (e.g. private duties, such as child or pet care), lack of funds or time, proneness to engage in activities which generate fast and measurable results instead of activities generating uncertain and deferred outcomes (stressing that they should keep working on that), the inability to manage time or bad organization, excessive attention paid to useless activities (often performed *pro public bono*), a large number of responsibilities, an education system, or even the "fragility of human nature".

A half of the respondents claimed that they did not delegate their professional responsibilities. Those respondents who delegated a part of their works onto others listed such tasks as employing an accountant to handle their financial statements, the intention to order paid interview transcriptions, looking for substitutes for complete works, or engaging family members in completing household chores in order not to lose potential commissions, handing over students who fail to develop the desired results to other teachers, skipping tasks which are not strictly related to the respondents' musical activity (e.g. guarding students on school trips), and refusing to play non-profitable concerts (in return for recommending people, for whom these projects may be potentially interesting).

In the end of the questionnaire, the respondents formulated their own comments. These concerned, among others, the need for better pay for their work, small possibility of delegating their tasks related to the university organization system, the need to take a time management training as part of university studies or when working at university. One of the respondents provided an elaborate answer, in which he claimed that he would have discussed this questionnaire differently a year earlier. However, having acquired significant experience, he noticed that he paid more attention to what could entail more benefits, not only material, but also those pertaining to skills, image or scientific accomplishment. He noticed that some musicians tended to engage in works and commissions which would bring financial benefits, through which they are "pigeonholed" and stop at a certain level of artistic development, blocking themselves from pursuing better work opportunities. What is also noteworthy is the statement which could be perceived as pathetic, but which reflects the emotions shared by many artists, and namely that "Musicians deserve a good life", which can be interpreted both in the sphere of the need for material and financial resources, and the need to secure a stable social

and employment situation, one that does not require them to take multiple, diverse commissions to ensure a sufficient financial inflow for them and their families.

The question of forced diversification of sources of income was one of the main topics raised in research interviews. A mere glance at the brief descriptions of the respondents indicates that none of them limits themselves to one activity only. Furthermore, all respondents take additional concert commissions, write texts, do small music composition jobs, play in bands and perform any other activities which, although are not completed as part of permanent cooperation, are often work- and time-consuming and require extensive preparations, rehearsals. These works often have short completion dates (e.g. substitution for another artist who went on a sick leave), and which have to be completed in a specific time and place. Musicians, particularly those who have private responsibilities, are not eager to engage in such projects, but are often forced to due to their financial situation. There are also opposite situations – for certain musicians, didactic work and artistic performances are the sources of satisfaction. They do not want to resign from any of them and are driven by other premises than profit.

In their research interviews, the respondents also signaled social security issues. Not all musicians are able to find stable, full-time employment, and artistic projects are often completed in the form of commissions or mandates. In extreme cases, with their music education, they are forced to take up occupations which are not related to their studies to obtain social security coverage when they are unable to find work that would satisfy their needs in their educated profession. Musicians with stable social security backgrounds in the form of full-time jobs, preferably in public institutions, are much more prone to engage in projects with high artistic values, ones that may not be as profitable.

Musicians point to the need for better education in self-management in time. They are open to technological novelties, a part of them read specialist literature or would like to read it, but have insufficient knowledge of specific, available titles (Stepniak, Stasiak-Betlejewska, 2016).

#### **4. Interpretation of results**

A synthesis of the research material accumulated and an analysis of the respondents' responses in the questionnaire and to research questions indicate that there are distinguishable similarities and differences among the respondents.

Self-management in time depends on several factors, and education is of key importance here (i.e. a music theorist focuses on different tasks to an instrumentalist), along with the place and form of employment (a business owner is forced to pay more attention to administrative and fiscal issues, compared to people employed full-time), the type of work performed (e.g. teaching, musicians focus on other priorities than research or artistic work), as well as personal situation – in their research interviews, respondents indicated that those who took care



of small children were less flexible in accepting new commissions or modifying their plans, compared to those who have no such responsibilities (at the same time, for the same reason, they tend to be much more organized and plan their actions in advance).

According to Stephen R. Covey's theory presented in the third habit from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, the most attention should be paid to important, but not urgent tasks, i.e. those situated in the second quadrant. A part of the respondents were also prone to interpreting the time management matrix in this manner, striving to limit the number of important and urgent tasks, striving to shift them to important, but not urgent categories. The second group would like to devote their attention to important and urgent tasks, or to maintain balance between quadrant 1 and quadrant 2. This can result from the specific character of their profession (e.g. instrument practice should be regular, and longer interruptions can cause the long-developed effects to be squandered) or the understanding of the very idea of urgency and importance of tasks. For quarters 3 and 4, the majority of respondents attempted at limiting both the urgent and the non-urgent activities, which are classified as not important. Insofar as the distribution of time devoted to tasks from each quadrant is similar for factual state diagnosis, the distribution of time for an ideal distribution is more diverse.

Analyzing the questionnaires and interviews carried out with a part of the respondents, we can conclude that important and urgent tasks include those tasks which produce measurable material effects, e.g. financial gain. Due to the dynamic character of the music environment, the uncertainty of employment and difficult in finding profitable commissions or jobs, artists praise projects which create a financial gain for them, which they prioritize over tasks which are more stimulating from the artistic or scientific point of view. However, the financial gain is not certain or is deferred for these tasks, and may never translated into material profit.

Respondents also pointed to the need to adapt their responsibilities to the plans of the institutions they work for, or the projects they participate in. Situations when they are not able to learn their schedules ahead of time is a serious problem for them. Participating in many activities, they often face a clash of event dates and incompatibilities not only for them, but also for other interested parties – students, contract parties, superiors, etc., and for commissions performed away from the place of residents, these are also measurable financial losses related to the purchase of railway or airplane tickets.

## 5. Summary

The factual data collected indicates that the issues related to musicians' time management are extremely important. The multitude of activities taken forces artists to permanently prioritize their objectives and projects, to maintain flexibility in accepting and completing orders, and to maintain a balance between personal life with professional responsibilities, which

are not always stable. What is also important is that musicians are rarely able to delegate the tasks the respondents indicated, and suffer from uncertainty in the social and financial sphere. Social security is also one of the factors which convince musicians to engage in ambitious artistic and social projects which do not guarantee a material profit.

What was noteworthy, the respondents said that they spent most of their time completing tasks from the group of important and urgent or important and not urgent activities, and that they performed not important tasks usually for formal reasons or because their employer requested it. At the same time, they remarked that they would like to limit the number of such activities. What is interesting, some musicians wanted to focus solely on important and urgent tasks, which contradicts Stephen R. Covey's claims. This can however stem from the specific character of their profession, which involves constant practice and skill set development. On the other hand, for people, for whom playing the instrument is not the main source of income, important, but not urgent activities are the basis of their profession.

A part of the respondents pointed to the need to stay fit, maintain a good mental condition, good interpersonal relations, and to stay motivated. This way, despite many activities, they are able to achieve multiple goals without damaging their health and their quality of life, which can be construed as a reference to Stephen Covey's seventh habit from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* – “sharpen the saw” (Covey, 2016). What is also noticeable is their pursuit of increased productivity of their activities (Keplinger, 2011), their high professional mobility (Godlewska-Werner, 2011) and their involvement in interesting projects with a high artistic level, or their pursuit of social objectives (Chirkowska-Smolak, 2011). A part of the respondents are also able to effectively identify and eliminate the “time wasters” and some time management errors listed in literature (Sierpińska, 2013).

An interesting conclusion is that a part of the respondents admitted that completing the questionnaire and conducting the research interview inspired them to rethink their time management routine, consider what is important and urgent for them, and what activities they could limit without damaging their personal and professional growth. This proves that musicians strive for self-development and for the development of their skills in self-management, and are open to any initiatives which could help them increase their competences in this respect, and the matrix proposed by Stephen R. Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 2016) can be a useful tool for all artists who want to improve their self-management in time.

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