Bandwidth Management

Bandwidth is the intersection of energy, time, and attention. Bandwidth management refers to the capacity to use your energy, time, and attention in the most effective and fulfilling way possible. It is something that impacts individuals, teams, and organizations.

Why Bandwidth Management Matters
Bandwidth improves our capacity to:

- Think strategically
- Take in new information (i.e., digest, distill, and store new information in our longterm memory)
- Nurture relationships;
- Proactively invest in systems
- Engage in self-care (i.e., take care of our bodies, emotions, relationships, etc.) and build healthy habits to enhance self-care over time.

Without bandwidth, we risk:

- Living in crisis or chaos (this leads to adrenaline fatigue and a higher risk of burnout);
- Being reactive (letting external factors drive our actions).
- Being overly tactical and missing strategy.

Optimizing Capacity

Picture a water pipe. Most pipes have a fixed diameter, limiting how much water can flow through a pipe at any given time. Bandwidth is similar. Though we all have bandwidth, it is finite. There is a limit to how much information we can generate and process at any given time. So, how can you increase your volume/capacity?

When it comes to water pipes, there are two options:

1. You can increase the circumference of the pipe (this is costly and may offer diminishing returns since you'll still be left with finite capacity).

2. You can reduce the amount and refine the quality of what is flowing through the pipes (this is less expensive, less disruptive, and more sustainable).

The same holds true for individuals. The most effective way to build bandwidth is to reduce and refine the information we are processing daily

Strategies for Building Capacity

Step 1: Do a self-audit

Current state

- Where are you spending your time?
- Make a list of what takes time, energy, and attention.
- What are you most focused on?
- What is consuming most of your energy, time, and attention?

Success state

- In an ideal state, where would you be spending your time?
- What would you be most focused on?
- What would be consuming your energy, time, and attention?

Critical stakeholders

- Who will be impacted by the changes you need to make to build bandwidth?
- Whose support do you need to engage?

Step 2: Enhance your filters, focus, fences, and fuel

Construct fences

- Restrict what is grabbing your attention (e.g., turn down unnecessary meetings and obligations).

Build filters

- Have the right things coming through at the right time (e.g., turn off notifications on your laptop, phone, or tablet to ensure you're only focused on a single task).

Increase focus

- Reduce distractions in your life (e.g., eliminate or dial down the volume on any habits or relationships that are draining you).

Fuel up

- Nourish yourself to build the energy needed to better manage your filters, focus, and fences moving forward (e.g., rehydrate, exercise, prioritize sleep, meditate, and do whatever else you need to do to be at your best).

Step 3: Make bandwidth management a habit

Build bandwidth management into your routine

- Do it regularly and consistently to be successful

Tip:

Start with quick wins and small shifts. Identify micro pockets of time to help you open up bandwidth and begin to build greater efficiencies.

Solving a bandwidth problem is like getting out of debt. First, find a little extra cash (e.g., cut back where it is easiest) and start paying down the debt draining you most (the debt with the highest interest). Once you get traction and momentum, the flywheel takes off!

Bandwidth is a decision and discipline. Something you decide you want and commit to overtime. To consistently build bandwidth, you need to make bandwidth management a habit.

The Challenge of Bandwidth Management

Bandwidth management is essential, and it is challenging for many reasons:

Fly at a higher altitude

It often takes altitude or perspective to see where you are, what could work better, and what needs to shift, yet the ability to achieve altitude is reduced when you are struggling with low bandwidth.

Drive internal and external change

Bandwidth management requires us to step into the learning zone (and sometimes close to terror's edge) to change ourselves and those around us.

Energize

Behavioral change is difficult and requires persistence (when we're low on bandwidth, it can be challenging to find the energy to drive this change).

Get unstuck

Extracting ourselves from existing obligations and situations is much harder than injecting ourselves into things.

Tune out detractors

Others may resist our desire to change

Embrace new habits

For some people, being down in the weeds feels familiar and may even be a counter-productive "comfort zone".

Challenge the status quo

Ultimately, managing bandwidth is challenging because it requires us to change how we are doing things, challenge the status quo, and in some cases, shift what's in our circle of control

The Long-term Benefits of Building Bandwidth

Bandwidth is vital to growth. We need time, energy, and attention to be able to:

Take on new challenges and pursue new opportunities;
• Digest complex information and conflicting data;
• Reflect and take perspective.

Ideas Into Action

Awareness

- Notice where you feel focused and on target (aka harnessing the power of bandwidth) and where you are not.
- What supports you in being fully present and focused?
- What distracts you from being fully present and focused?
- Audit where you "fail" and succeed, as both leave clues.

Activation

- Build upon success strategies.
- Block periods of time for focused thinking.
- What supports your focus? What helps you to optimize your bandwidth?
- Practice deep attention and track successes.

Agility Building

- Just as flow begets flow, harness the power of bandwidth to create more bandwidth.
- Engage others in conversation about bandwidth and brainstorm their success strategies.
- Track where you have it and where you want more.

Accountability

- Observe bandwidth in your day-to-day interactions with others.
- What is your "story" about bandwidth?
- Revisit priorities to ensure focus is aligned with what matters most.
- Track bandwidth over time and across different projects.

Integration/Acceleration

- Build in systems to proactively manage bandwidth.
- Focus on successes to build future momentum.

Cultivating greater bandwidth is vital to leadership, impact, and well-being.

Bandwidth management is a discipline: An ongoing process, that we must consistently invest in sharpening.

Practice with gentleness, remembering that it is a journey, not a destination.

Ready to start strategically building bandwidth?
Set up a time to talk to Dr. Camille Preston and the AIM Leadership team.
Visit aimleadership.com. © 2024 AIM Leadership