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COVID-19

Set Yourself Some Deadlines

There are historical references from the 19th century supporting an origin of the word, deadline, indicating a line or ditch created around the perimeter of a prison, over which if a prisoner crosses he (or she) will be shot dead.

Gail Perry, CPA • Oct. 26, 2020



There are historical references from the 19th century supporting an origin of the word, *deadline*, indicating a line or ditch created around the perimeter of a prison, over which if a prisoner crosses he (or she) will be shot dead. While such usage might seem outdated or even overly extreme, it stands to reason that the significance of the term could not be overlooked, lest one's life itself might be on the line, as it were.

Today we think of deadlines as due dates, times after which a project or activity will no longer be accepted or allowed. Under normal circumstances, a phrase that probably will never be applied to anything that happened in 2020, April 15th represents a deadline for filing certain income tax returns; another deadline example that is also potentially being extended or modified this year might be the upcoming U.S. election, the votes for which might or might not be required to be made by November 3rd.

But 2020 aside, we in the accounting profession live in a world defined by deadlines. Not only are there various types of filing deadlines that occur every month, we constantly force deadlines on ourselves by scheduling audits, reviews, examinations, appointments, calls, meetings, and so on. Without deadlines, our work world might spiral into chaos.

And while 2020's pandemic has upstaged much of what we like to think of as normal work scheduling, it appears that deadlines are actually more important than ever. When your colleagues are working remotely, when children are schooling at home, when elderly family members need extra care, when businesses are closed and people are taking gig assignments, when everything we once considered normal is in a state of upheaval, the one thing we can count on is the deadlines we set for ourselves.

Whether you enter your deadlines into your electronic calendar, jot them down on a pad of paper, write them on sticky notes placed on your mirror or refrigerator or computer screen, tie strings around your fingers, or use other creative methods for remembering, the deadline becomes the organizing tool in your life. It's the one thing we can count on to guide us to the next milestone.

I encourage employers, team leaders, parents, individuals to set hard deadlines for yourself and those who report to you. Adding an item to your to-do list is a great way to keep track of the item, but without a fixed date and time for finishing the project, that project is likely to get pushed aside.

And while there is plenty of talk these days about how successful remote working is turning out to be, I think most can agree that it's easier to manage projects when people are present and accounted for during fixed times of the day. If your team (and that can be your work team or your personal/family team) is working a flex schedule and can't always be reached at what we once thought of as normal business hours, it's more of a challenge to finish tasks by particular dates. Set some deadlines. You might find they will help. And watch out for ditches.

Meanwhile, on an unrelated topic, I'd like to provide a hat tip to the AICPA and its technology arm, CPA.com. We've never experienced anything like this global pandemic, there's no pandemic rule book for the accounting profession and the clients it serves, and yet, somehow, the folks at AICPA/CPA.com have managed to provide extraordinary leadership and guidance in these uncharted waters. From bi-weekly town hall meetings, to legislative representation, to worksheets and FAQs and constantly revised resources and tools, I believe I'm speaking for the entire profession in saying we are uniformly grateful for your direction, assistance, support, long hours, weekends and nights, outreach, compassion, and responsiveness as we all make our way through COVID-19 and its many ramifications. Thank you.

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