

Time Management for Busy People

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Too little time and too much to do is a common condition for many of us. Everyday demands or chores seem to engulf the day, leaving little time to pursue things you enjoy. According to a recent nation-wide environmental scan, time management was nineteenth of the top 20 pressing social issues facing Americans (Jenson & Daly, 1988). Nevertheless, you do have choices in how you spend your time. Balancing what you need to do with what you want to do can lead to greater opportunity for success and happiness.

Time: Reflection On The Past

The sands of time fall steadily through the hourglass--whether we use our time wisely or unwisely. You and I are exactly one day older and closer to our inevitable deaths than we were yesterday at this time. Are we spending our time, today, the best way we can?

IF I HAD MY LIFE TO LIVE OVER

Nadine Stair of Louisville, Kentucky...

written when she was 78 years old.

I'd dare to make more mistakes next time, I'd relax.

I would limber up.

I would be sillier than I have been this trip.

I would take fewer things seriously.

I would take more chances.

I would take more trips.

I would climb more mountains and swim more rivers.

I would eat more ice cream and less beans.

I would perhaps have more troubles, but I'd have fewer imaginary ones.

You see, I'm one of those people who lives sensibly and sanely hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I've had my moments, and if I had it to do over again, I'd have more of them. In

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fact, I'd try to have nothing else. Just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day.

I've been one of those persons who never goes anywhere without a thermometer, a hot-water bottle, a raincoat and a parachute. If I had it to do again, I would travel lighter than I have.

If I had my life to live over, I would start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall.

I would go to more dances.

I would ride more merry-go-rounds.

I would pick more daisies.

What Is Good Time Management?

Time management does not mean being busy all the time. It means using your time the way you want to use it--which can include large doses of daydreaming and doing nothing. Good time management brings increased relaxation, reduced stress, personal satisfaction, and successful goal accomplishment. (Dorothy Cudaback, May 1980.)

The key to get what you want out of life is to know where you are going. Goal setting is a critical life skill to effective time-life management.

Many of us blame others for wasting our time. "It's not my fault I'm late--that child of mine refuses to hurry up!" "Everybody always asks me to do more things when I already have too much to do!" "If it wasn't for_____, I would have been able to_____."

As long as you play the "blame game," you assume little responsibility for improving your life. Once you accept responsibility on how to spend your time, you regain power to direct your life.

Many people complain that they do not have enough time. But honestly, you have enough time to do what is important. You can always make time for the people and activities you value. See each day as a new opportunity to practice mastering your time.

Time is one of the deepest mysteries known to men and women. No one can say exactly what it is, other than we pass it, make it, take it, spend it, crave it, kill it, and enjoy it. Although most of the planet's resources and wealth are distributed unequally to earthlings, of daily time we each have 24 hours.

You cannot really manage time that passes at a predetermined rate--8,760 hours per year--regardless of what you do. You can, however, learn to manage yourself.

Why Do You Want To Change How You Manage Your Time?

To begin taking charge of your life, ask why you want to manage your time better. Take a minute to list the reasons you want to manage your time better.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

5.

Some people want to manage time to earn more money or increase productivity. Others want to free themselves from "hurry sickness" and allow time for themselves and personal growth. Others want more time to spend with family and friends.

How Do You Want To Change?

What do you want to do differently about managing your time? Listed are examples of four objectives:

- establish three personal and career goals,
- learn to set priorities,
- learn to say "no" tactfully, and
- take better care of myself through diet and exercise four days a week.

List up to five objectives that you will commit to work on. Often individuals try to change too much all at once and give up when they see little progress.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Circle your most important objective for use later.

Two Keys To Success

Once-useful habits may now be first-class time wasters. Carol learned that it paid to be organized. She received praise at home and school for her organized room, her organized art supplies and later her organized college swimming trophies. When she accepted her first office job, she took time each day to organize her desk. Now she spends half of each day organizing her office before getting on with the work at hand. She complains of not having enough time. Tom had just one thing to do in one day--visit a friend. He spent two hours deciding what to wear, another hour locating the house keys, 30 minutes finding money for the bus, and 20 more minutes deciding whether or not to wear an overcoat. This procedure was typical of him and illustrates C. Northcote Parkinson's Law, "work expands to fill the time available."

How much are you like Carol or Tom? Do you retain habits long after they serve their purpose, blow good habits out of proportion, or hold on to time-wasting habits?

Lifetime habits are difficult to change. Anyone who has attempted to lose weight, stop smoking or start exercising knows this all too well. There are two keys to success in changing lifetime behaviors.

First **identify a prize**, a benefit in a new behavior that the little kid in you wants just as badly as a first bicycle. If, for example, you decided a few minutes ago that you want to learn to say "no" tactfully, then your prize might be that you will have more time to go camping with your family.

Next **pay the price** by giving up an old prize. Let's say that you are accustomed to doing your best to please everyone from the clerk who bags your groceries to your boss. If you decided earlier that you want to learn to say "no" tactfully, then you might have to give up trying to please certain people in your life. What price are you willing to pay to learn that new behavior?

Let's think about the price and prize for a woman to change her "superwoman" image. As a homemaker, a woman may believe that she must do all jobs perfectly that fall within her role as homemaker. She bakes her own bread and cookies, chauffeurs her kids to their many activities, has an immaculate house with laundry done, has time to exercise and keep current on local and national issues, and, of course, always maintains a sunny disposition. Sometimes, when a woman like this enters the work force, she hates to relinquish any of her former jobs or she fails to assert herself with family members to negotiate home responsibilities. Women who wish to manage their time and lives should realize that whether they work inside or outside the home, it helps to set realistic goals for themselves. Also, changes in lifestyle, such as re-entry into the work force, generally require compromise and readjustment of family priorities. To earn the prize, there's a price to be paid.

Re-write here the **objective** you circled earlier.

Write down the **prize** for you to reach this objective.

What is the **price**? _____

Once you identify the price to pay to change your lifetime habit and the prize you get for doing so, and once you are willing to pay the price to get the prize, you are ready to exchange an old time-wasting habit for good time management.

What's In It For You?

Research indicates that people improve their social well-being by incorporating into their lifestyles time management strategies like those described here, along with other strategies. When people practice time management along with other health-enhancing behaviors, e.g. stress management, studies report the following positive outcomes:

- * Reviews of programs that contained some time management strategies found that such programs may reduce coronary risk factors (Bhalla, 1980; Gentry, 1978; Suinn, 1978, 1980).
- * A Kentucky study of 154 Cooperative Extension 4-H agents who participated in a two-day stress and time management workshop found a significant drop in stress levels a month following the program (Fetsch, Flashman, & Jeffiers, 1984).
- * Significant decreases in stress levels and increases in positive coping behavior levels were found in participants of full-day stress and time management workshops (Fetsch & Botkin, 1984). They used the strategies offered in this workbook along with others to establish life goals, prioritize daily tasks, develop problem-solving skills, use time and stress management strategies, and create a personal stress management plan.

- * A Colorado study of 122 Cooperative Extension agents who participated in full-day Balancing Work and Family Workshops (Fetsch & Kennington, 1988) found a number of significant increases three months later:
 - * personal life satisfaction levels,
 - * satisfaction level with spouse/significant other,
 - * satisfaction level with children, and
 - * overall life satisfaction levels.
- * These changes were found even though participants' stress levels increased--probably due to seasonal increases in job demands. Participants wrote measurable, realistic goals, used "To Do Lists" daily, took personal time regularly to relax, and practiced saying "no" tactfully to low-priority expectations.
- * Burnout and depression levels of 70 Florida professional people were reduced significantly five months following full-day Balancing Work and Family workshops (Fetsch & Pergola, 1990). Satisfaction levels with personal life increased significantly.

All of the above educational programs were tailored to address the identified needs of the participants. The workshops included both time and stress management research findings and practical applications.

Turning time management skills into habits will take time--but can you imagine the benefits? With two or three hours and the help of this workbook you can learn valuable techniques to manage your time and your life. You will know yourself better and you just might realize a dream or two.

Life Goals

Successful time-life management starts with writing down your goals. The following exercises can help you establish your goals in your personal, family and work life.

1. Quickly list four or five lifetime dreams, values, and goals for yourself, family and work/business. (For example: have three close friends, spend two weeks a year on a family vacation, clear \$95,000/year.)

<u>Personal</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Work</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

2. List the three or four goals for yourself, family and business that you would like to accomplish in the next three years. (For example: develop one close friendship, hold weekly family meetings, pay off debt on home/farm.)

<u>Personal</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Work</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

- 3. Imagine that you just learned you have six months to live. What would you want to accomplish in the next six months.

<u>Personal</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Work</u>

- 4. Review and rank order your five most important goals (#1 is most important, #2 is next most important, etc.)
- 5. To guarantee success in reaching your goals, set three or four objectives. The more specific, measurable and achievable your objectives, the greater your chance of reaching them. Here are some tips--one objective at a time:
 - a. Circle your most important objective.
 - b. The part of this objective that I want to accomplish in the next 30 days is to _____.
 - c. The results of my 30-day objective that others can see I accomplished are _____.
 - d. Make certain your objective is specific and measurable.
 - e. Make sure you have the ability and resources to achieve the objective within the next 30 days.
 - f. Repeat the process in step 5 with the next most important objective, etc.
- 6. After you refine five of your most important objectives, if you are married ask your spouse to do the same. You might set aside an hour or two to compare and negotiate mutual goals.
- 7. If married, make a mutual decision about what goal the two of you want to reach. Break down that goal into manageable, bite-sized objectives. List specific steps each of you will take during the next six months to accomplish your most important goal.
- 8. Write down the payoff for you to accomplish your 30-day objective for each important goal: _____
- 9. Write down the price you pay to accomplish each objective: _____
- 10. If you could sabotage or wreck your good work, write down the ways you would do so: _____
- 11. You have already begun to reach your most important goal. Spend time each week working toward it and celebrate your accomplishments.

Visualize Your Goals

Take time daily to form a clear mental picture of who you want to be and how you want to act three years from now. If your goal is to be confident, then use your imagination to see yourself walking, talking, thinking and being confident. Formulate "self" statements that strengthen your positive image: "I feel calmer and more confident every day." Get so excited about reaching your goal that it seems real to you. Your mind is a powerful tool. Take time

daily to relax and visualize yourself accomplishing your goals so you will act on them. Then act as if you have already reached your goal.

Remember, if you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there. Conversely, if you do know your destination, you can quickly determine what route is best for you.

Know Your Prime Time

To be more efficient with your time and energy, know and use your prime time--the time during the day when you are most likely to be alert, enthusiastic and creative (Cudaback, June 1980). Chart your energy level for a typical day. Under each hour, place a dot to represent your level of energy for that hour. Draw a line to connect the dots. Then note your peaks and valleys of energy.

Energy Graph	Morning					Afternoon					Evening					Night							
Your energy level at this hour	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3
very high																							
high																							
medium																							
low																							
sleep																							

Each person's graph is different. Some people are morning people; others are evening people. When you have a choice, use your prime time for important jobs that require the most attention and effort and save more routine tasks for low-energy times. Look for ways to lengthen your high-energy periods. Keep interruptions to a minimum or eliminate them completely. Structure your day around the needs of children, spouse and others. Use energizers for more energy when you need to concentrate. Simple energizers for healthy people include rhythmic deep breathing, rolling shoulders and arms, and gradually tensing the entire body from toes to head and then relaxing, letting go. Breaks, relaxation exercises, balanced diet and improved physical fitness also can help.

There also is external prime time--those times when external resources, usually people, are available to you. Plan your daily schedule to take advantage of time when agencies and stores are open, and when you can contact workers, supervisors and colleagues to help you with information, consultation and problem-solving. By completing high energy tasks when you have high energy and vice versa, you'll get more done in less time.

Say "NO"

One roadblock to time management is the difficulty some people have saying "no."

Learning how to say "no", simple as it may sound, actually is the most difficult aspect of time management for many. Yet, this is a skill that you must develop because without it, all other time management behaviors are of little value.

Establish personal, family and work priorities. Maintain open communication with your supervisors regarding changing needs and priorities. By doing this, you are in a better position to say "yes" to high-priority demands and feel supported by your supervisor when you say "no" to low-priority requests.

Imagine you have been asked to plan a field trip for children to the local library. One way to say "no" tactfully is to use the following four steps:

1. Maintain an I-win-you-win attitude.
2. Acknowledge the need, e.g. "Gee, the library is a neat place to take children on a field trip--I bet a lot of parents would enjoy showing them around."
3. Join with the requester in striving to address the need, e.g. "Let's talk about some parents who might help out."
4. Educate regarding your niche and refer to someone with more appropriate resources, e.g. "With my schedule, I won't be able to accompany you on a full-day field trip. Someone I'd suggest you call is _____."

The ability to say "no" permits you to exercise greater control over your own life. Because you are clear about what you want and do not want to do, without vacillation, you can tactfully accept or reject any expectations requested of you. By not being over committed to a variety of tasks, you can spend your time productively on activities that have meaning to you.

Increase Your Efficiency

Another roadblock to time management is inefficient use of time. A "To Do" list is a time-management technique that can help increase your efficiency by at least one-third.

Write down on a "To Do" list the ten most important things you have to do tomorrow. Be sure and allow time for interruptions.

Put a check mark in the appropriate column to indicate whether you would be better off completing the task during a high-energy or a low-energy period of the day.

Rank the tasks in order of their importance to you, your family, and the company, agency, school for which you work (1 is for the most important; 10 is for the least important).

Decide if you can delegate any of the activities to someone else. In terms of long-range objectives, learning how to delegate can be a major time-management tool. Time spent training or supervising someone to do a job can pay off handsomely. Check those things on your "To Do" list that you can delegate to a co-worker, subordinate, volunteer or family member. Then delegate! Those tasks that only you can do and that are important to you, your family and employer are the ones to work on.

Begin working on item number 1 with all your energy and concentration. Do not think about the others. Work on item 1 until you complete it, or until you choose to stop. Then check the started or completed column. Go on with item number 2 and proceed in the same fashion until it is time to quit for the day.

Do not worry if you accomplish only four of your 10 objectives in a day. If you could not complete all of them with this method, you probably could not have done so with any other method. You worked on the most important ones--the others will wait until you get to them. Notice and enjoy what you did accomplish.

You might set up a reward system to further encourage your productivity, particularly if you tend to procrastinate. You might decide, "If I accomplish today items 1 through 4, then I will reward myself by unwinding for 30 minutes to the sounds of a favorite musical tape."

Some of us need to remind ourselves about long-range goals and directions. At the bottom of your "To Do" list allow space for personal notes and reminders.

Make extra copies of the "To Do" list and use this system to list priorities daily. You will find that you get the important things accomplished--one day at a time.

Remember:

- * Set priorities.
- * Allow time for interruptions.
- * Be aware of and use your prime time--that time each day when you are most alert, enthusiastic and creative.
- * Be good to yourself--set reasonable, realistic goals.
- * Set aside time for yourself (10 minutes per day add up to more than 60 hours per year).
- * Limit time spent on tasks you hate.
- * Delegate at work and at home.
- * Consolidate trips, tasks.
- * Cross out completed tasks to see what you have accomplished.
- * Don't carry over unimportant tasks to the next day.
- * Reward yourself.

Handling Big Jobs

Cudaback (July 1980) offers several practical suggestions:

- * Start now; don't wait for that free day or week.
- * Break big jobs into little tasks and list them. Include some instant tasks.
- * Schedule times to do tasks, and do at least one instant task right away. This may give you the momentum to get started.
- * When possible delegate.
- * Set time limits.
- * If needed, increase the payoff for finishing the task by letting a co-worker know your plans or by promising yourself a reward. Making dates with friends or co-workers to provide progress reports may help you keep your promise to yourself.

Beware!

For all you Type A readers who are prone to rush through caution lights to save five or 10 minutes, be gentle with yourself. Slow down and pick the daisies. In a society enamored with efficiency and productivity, it is vital that we manage our lives and our time so that we as individuals and as communities of individuals and families--live healthier, happier, more peace-filled lives. Gandhi told us, "There is more to life than increasing its speed."

References

For further reading on related topics, ask your Colorado State University Cooperative Extension agent for copies of the following Service in Action fact sheets: SIA 10.228, *Resolving conflict*; SIA 10.229, *Understanding stress*; SIA 11.004, *Time management*; and SIA 11.013, *Professional job burnout*.

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Priority Assigned	TO DO Date: _____	High-Energy Task	Low-Energy Task	Delegated	Started	Completed
	Leave this space blank to add any interruptions to your list.					

REWARD: If I accomplish items _____ today, I will reward myself by
(priority numbers)

NOTES TO MYSELF: (For example, I will set reasonable and realistic goals. I will not set myself up to fail and feel miserable.)

Time Management for Busy People¹. Katey Walker and Nayda I. Torres² How often do you say, "I'd like to do that, but I don't have time?" Learning to manage time is a problem for many people. Employers, employees, students, and home managers alike complain that there are never enough hours in the day to get things done.Â Most people are surprised to learn how much time they actually spend doing trivial things. You will probably find that you are very busy at certain times of the day and certain days of the week. These busy periods, or "peak loads," can be managed by temporarily reducing time on other activities and by advance planning. You will also find that you have a number of routine tasks that must be done at times dictated by conditions beyond your control. Time Management Tip #5: Take time off. Many business people in particular fall into the seven day trap. They feel that the more time they pour into their business, the more successful their business will be. Before you know it, they're working seven days a week every week and wondering why they feel so frazzled all the time!Â But you will be able to more effectively manage the time you have. And in terms of what you get done and how you feel, that will make all the difference. For more advice on how to effectively manage your time and accomplish what you want to accomplish see