

# Time Management

## Setting Goals and Priorities

The first step in effectively managing time is to develop an explicit statement of your long-range goals. This statement of goals will allow you to set shorter range goals and to prioritize specific activities according to how much they contribute to your goals. Setting these long-range goals may be more difficult than you imagine. The process can force you to confront decisions that you have been putting off, or value issues that you don't want to handle.

## Following is an example of a long term goal and related intermediate and short term goals:

Long-Term Career Goal: Career as a Counselor/Psychologist (6 to 8 years).

Intermediate Career Goals:

Enter a Ph.D. or Master's program in Counseling or Clinical Psychology (3 to 5 years). Graduate Assistantship or Counseling job at the Bachelor's level (2 to 4 years).

## Short-Term Personal Goals: (Present):

Major in psychology.

Courses in education, biology, and statistics.

At least a 3.5 average for Masters.

Volunteer work as a hot-line counselor.

Volunteer or paid work as a research assistant (to generate reference letters from faculty).

Study skills course to improve grades and study habits.

Find a quieter living environment at the end of the term to improve study time.

## Daily, Weekly, and Semester Scheduling

The heart of effective time management is in weekly time organization; however, you also need a semester-long calendar to lay out all of your major obligations. Remember, if you don't have clearly defined goals, scheduling will be difficult for you for two reasons. First, you won't have any guidelines to use for prioritizing your activities; and second, you will have trouble motivating yourself to complete the tasks in your schedule that are not immediately gratifying. You will, for example, be tempted to go to a movie instead of studying calculus (which may be necessary for the long-term goal of becoming an engineer).

Two general approaches to weekly scheduling can work well. The first is fairly simple and involves a daily list of things you want to accomplish that day. In order to use this method you need to know what your activities and obligations are for several weeks. This will allow you to make a daily list and modify and prioritize with a clear understanding of your very short-term goals. This kind of approach appeals most to people who don't like too much structure and don't want to be locked into an hour-by-hour schedule.

Following is an example of a two-day period using the daily list type of schedule with a simple A-B-C priority system. (A = Highest Priority, B = Moderate Priority, C = Lowest Priority.) This is a schedule for Ed, a student who works and attends law school:

Thursday (Home from Work at 5:30 P.M.)

Review notes for legal ethics class. (A)  
Study for contracts class. (C)  
Work out at the gym. (B)  
Talk after dinner with wife. (A)  
Prepare sales brief for tomorrow. (A)  
Write a letter to brother. (C)  
Friday (Off Work at 2:00 P.M.)

Do contracts assignment. (A)  
Library research. (B)  
Lion's Club meeting. (C)  
Work out at the gym. (A)  
Review notes for test next week. (C)  
Play catch with son. (A)

In this schedule, you should be able to determine some of Ed's long-term goals and also see how he uses flexibility in his schedule. One of his goals is obviously to finish law school. From the way he prioritizes activities, it would also appear that another goal is to be a good father and husband. He also appears to be committed to a balanced schedule because he includes time for exercise, contact with his brother, and a softball game.

A written list is essential. The list should be somewhere available to you throughout the day. You may want to carry a notebook or card with the items on it. You will also find it helpful to post the list somewhere as a reminder.

A more detailed kind of schedule will be necessary for people who need more structure than the flexible list method offers. The most common method is to use an hour-by-hour weekly schedule. This allows you to allocate time specifically and gives you a very clear guideline of what to do when. Although some people find this confining, others welcome the order and find it extremely helpful. Basically this involves using an hour-by-hour weekly calendar.

The key of course, is keeping to the schedule. Be realistic. It is important to allow for plenty of free time, recreation, etc. Many students try this method and fail because they set up a schedule that is too rigid and unrealistic. Remember also, that you must be able to keep your goals and priorities in mind in order to motivate yourself to follow this schedule.

## **Balance**

The most common time management mistake that people make is not allowing for a balanced life-style. Remember that one's overall health and wellness require attention to six important life areas.

Physical (exercise, nutrition, sleep)

Intellectual (cultural, aesthetic)

Social (intimate and social relationships)

Career (school and career goal directed work)

Emotional (expression of feelings, desires)

Spiritual (quest for meaning)

Certainly you don't have to have a designated set of activities in each of these areas; but if you notice one area that you don't attend to at all, you may be ignoring an important part of yourself. For example, if you set aside time for exercise, you will improve your overall functioning and also better manage your stress.

If you take time to foster your intellectual growth, you can gain new perspectives on life, experience some different kinds of pleasure, and perhaps be better able to focus on your goals.

### **Procrastination, Distractions, and Other Problems**

Time management seems like a very sensible approach, yet many people never really learn to manage their time. If you are having a problem with time management, consider the following suggestions:

Review your long-term and intermediate goals often. Keep a list where you will see it often.

Continually try to eliminate unnecessary tasks that are not related to your goals or to maintaining a balanced life style.

Take advantage of your natural cycles, schedule the most difficult activities when you are sharpest.

Learn to say "No" to people, including spouses, friends, children, and parents.

Reward yourself for effective time management.

Solicit cooperation from those around you. Let your spouse, family members, roommate, and others know about your efforts to manage time.

Attend to your needs for spontaneity.

Do not set yourself up to fail. Be realistic and work toward an individualized approach that makes sense for you.

Recording things -- the process of putting schedules, priorities, and plans on paper -- is helpful in itself.

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