



Time Management



Fact Sheet

Do you ever feel like there are not enough hours in the day?

This problem is common for people with growing children, but it is also a problem for others, especially those who are involved in community affairs, that tend to bite off a bigger chunk of responsibility than they can handle. Developing time management skills can help meet the demands of day-to-day living so that community service can also fit into the picture of your life.

Although we talk about managing time, we are really considering how to manage ourselves in relation to time.

Why Is Time Management Important?

Time management helps you:

- Keep a balance between your volunteer time, personal time, work time, and time for other people and interests.
- Accomplish priority items.
- Have free time without feeling guilty.
- Gain a sense of accomplishment.
- Reduce stress by not wasting time on what is not important.

Time Management Plans

A time management plan is a useful tool to accomplish these goals. Depending on your needs, a time management plan could be very simple or quite complex.

Here are three types of plans that you may want to consider:

1. List of projects

The simplest time plan is a list of large and small projects. These can be done as you have time and feel like doing them. When you have a lot of free time, this list may be all that you need to manage time effectively.

2. Series of projects

The series of projects is similar to the list of projects, but it also involves putting the activities into an order of priority. Start with your list of large and small projects, and decide which activities must be done first, second, third, etc.

For example, balancing your personal checkbook may be more important at the moment than writing up the minutes of the last church board meeting. You will, however, accomplish both tasks before spending time on trivial matters.

3. Detailed time schedule

A detailed time schedule includes both an order of projects and estimates of the time necessary for each project. This type of scheduling has special value to people whose obligations leave them with little free time. It is also important to

those who are just beginning to learn how to manage time.

You will need to look at your entire day or week and decide how important the various activities are, and how much time you will spend on them. If you know exactly what you are doing, why you are doing it, and approximately how long each task will take, you will work more effectively.

While planning takes time at first, it saves time later. The following is an example of a detailed schedule that may help when you have many tight deadlines.

Saturday morning, July 23

Task	Time	
Write list of what needs to be done	8:00	8:15
Spot clean the house	8:15	8:45
Write crucial letter	8:45	9:15
Phone committee chairman to get feedback	9:15	9:30
Take goods to recycling center	9:30	10:00
Go grocery shopping	10:00	10:45
Put groceries away	10:45	11:00
Fix lunch	11:00	11:30

Where Does Your Time Go?

Learning how to budget time is similar to learning how to budget money. You learn to decide how much — whether it be minutes or money — is needed to get something done. You may also want to consider your energy levels as you estimate time needs.

Start with these steps to develop your own time management plan.

1. Keep a written log.

If you are new at learning time management, or are bogged down by many pressures, a written time log can help you see where your time goes. Keep an honest and detailed record of what you do every half hour for a day or two. If you have a great deal of variety in your daily schedule, you might want to record longer.

Study your log to see what you do, when and why you get interrupted or frustrated, and when you are most productive. You may not realize how many times a week you use time and energy to plan committee meetings.

2. List your activities.

Flexible activities (those that can be done at any time during the day, such as grocery shopping or writing a report) and inflexible activities (those that must be done at specific times, such as serving meals or attending a meeting) should be included.

3. Estimate the time needed.

Write down an accurate estimate of the time needed to complete each task. Add up

the total time. How many hours do you need? You may need to divide big jobs into smaller ones.

4. Consider available time.

You may be over-committed if the time you need is greater than the time available. Decide where you can make changes.

5. Rank importance of tasks.

One way to rank tasks is to use the A-B-C system pioneered by management consultant, Alan K. Lakein.

“A” priorities are extremely important tasks which must get done. They lead to positive results and help accomplish personal goals, such as maintaining a car, exercising daily, or community goals; such as planning a meeting or soliciting funds door-to-door.

“C” priorities are tasks which are less important than other activities at a particular time. Personal examples are washing windows in the house, or community goals might include keeping a scrapbook of an organization’s activities (unless, of course, you are the historian). Paper shuffling and rewriting memos are often less useful activities in both personal life and community work.

“B” priorities are often difficult to identify. They are tasks which are important personally, and in a community-based sense, but less important than the “A” tasks. Personal examples might be planting some flowers in front of your house, or, in terms of your volunteer activities, organizing informational handouts for the next committee chairman to use to come up to speed.

Steps toward long-term goals, as well as short-term projects, should also be included in this list.

6. Decide when and where to begin.

You may decide to begin tomorrow at 9 a.m. Write down your “To-Do” list for the day, leaving some catch-up periods.

When you have finished planning, you will have a list of top-priority activities. These are things you want to work on today or tomorrow, and are ranked in the order of importance. Check off the tasks as you complete them.

Give yourself 10 to 20 minutes each day to review what happened to your time during that day. Like the video replay of a ball game, a quick rerun of your day lets you identify problem areas that need attention, as well as areas of accomplishment.

Busy people have to be creative in setting this time aside. Some prefer doing it the last thing at night, while others find time first thing in the morning.

Overcoming Procrastination

Procrastination is a problem for many people. A persistent effort is necessary to overcome it.

People procrastinate for many reasons, such as fear of failure or even fear of success. Spend some time thinking about if and why you procrastinate, and about the types of projects that you usually put off. Important projects are often put off

because the project is overwhelming or unpleasant.

Suggestions for coping with procrastination are the salami technique, the balance-sheet method, and the development of new time-management habits.

Salami Technique. This is based on the idea that a salami, in its original state, is hard to handle and unappetizing. After the salami is cut into thin slices, it is manageable and something that we can “sink our teeth into.”

Big projects should be sliced into small slices or “instant tasks.” The tasks should be so simple and quick that one can be finished in several minutes.

Make a list of these tasks. When you have a few minutes to spare, do a small task from your list.

Balance-Sheet Method. This method involves writing down why you are procrastinating on a certain project. On the left side of the paper list all the reasons why you are procrastinating. On the right side list all the benefits that will be received if you get the project done.

The effect is striking. On the left side, your excuses are often feeble. On the right side, you will have a long list of benefits. One benefit will be a feeling of relief that comes from getting necessary, but unpleasant tasks accomplished.

Habit-Change Approach. The third suggestion is a systematic approach to changing a habit. Procrastination is seldom related to a single item. It is usually an ingrained behavior pattern. It is important that you take action to overcome procrastination and set realistic goals. Use your “To-Do” list regularly. Give yourself small rewards for accomplishments.

More Ways to Manage Time

1. Learn to say “No.”

Many of us don’t know how to refuse a request for our time, even when we have essential things to do. Make it a point to politely and directly refuse requests that will over-commit and frustrate you. Since time is limited, remind yourself that saying “no” to one request is saying “yes” to a more important activity.

2. Use your most productive time wisely.

What time of day are you most efficient? We all function on different biological clocks. Some people feel most energetic and do their best work in the morning, like the early bird who catches the worm. Others wake up and slowly get moving, with top efficiency in the late afternoon. Still others are “night owls” who accomplish their work easily in the middle of the night.

Plan your day so that you will be doing your most important tasks at your most productive time. Make an appointment with yourself so that you can take advantage of your “prime time.”

3. Write things down.

Use a large calendar. Locate it centrally for quick reference. You can use it to remember personal appointments, and to alert yourself to time conflicts. Detailed planners — both in written and electronic forms — are useful tools for some people.

4. Group similar jobs together.

Suppose you have five telephone calls to make: three are essential and two are secondary. You also have six letters to write, four of which are vital.

- Set time aside to make the three essential calls, one right after another.
- Group the four essential letters together and write them, one after another.
- Do not fall into the trap of making the secondary phone calls before tackling the essential letters (unless they can be done very quickly).

5. Deal effectively with interruptions.

Many of us have jobs where we must be available to others by telephone, in person, by memo, and even by electronic mail.

Social interruptions can often be managed by telling the person that you are facing a deadline and would like to talk to them at a later time. Use your “To-Do” list to get you back to work on your major project after you have been interrupted.

Conclusion

Do you have trouble managing your time wisely?

Try putting a time management plan into writing.

- List tasks you need to accomplish in their order of priority and the time needed to accomplish each task.
- Learn to say “no” to requests for your time.
- Use your most productive time wisely, grouping similar jobs together.
- Take control of your time instead of procrastinating on certain jobs or letting time slip away.

You may be surprised at what you accomplish.

Adapted from:

Making Every Minute Count. Balancing Work and Family Series. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Cooperative Extension Service.

Walker, Doris “Katey”. *Time Management*, Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service.