

Time Management for Leaders

Time management is important to any student, but it is particularly important to those involved in student organizations. Involvement in an extra-curricular activity or group means that in addition to classes, meals, jobs, and socializing, another significant amount of your time is automatically taken when it comes to scheduling your day. The information presented here and on the linked pages provides some pointers on how to more efficiently manage one of your most precious resources, time!

Managing your time is a highly personal skill. Only you know your peak work hours, your attention span, and your eating and sleeping needs. Using what you know about yourself, you can create an effective time management strategy. Do not pretend to be a morning person if you are not. Be honest with yourself.

The information presented in the links below present general ideas for success and how these ideas might be applied. Whatever method works for you is the right one, so remember to take your own self-awareness into account.

Time Management Three Steps

There are three essential steps to efficient time management. They are:

- A. Organizing
- B. Prioritizing
- C. Scheduling

One main idea to remember in the process of developing your time management strategy is to be flexible in your planning. Allow for the unexpected. The only sure thing in your schedule is that the unexpected will happen.

A. Organizing

In the morning or even the night before, make a list of everything you want or need to do for that day (if done the night before, what you want to do the following day). It is not necessary to prioritize at this time. Don't even think about which jobs are the most important--just write down everything you can think of. Right now you are just brainstorming.

Sometimes, it is good to list tasks or "things to do" over the next 5-7 days. This can help plan longer projects (i.e., more than one day) better. Besides that, none of us is perfect, and there will be days when we may forget or just don't feel like doing some things. Giving yourself more than one day to do a project gives you more flexibility (and more room for error).

B. Prioritizing

Now that you have written everything down, the next step is to rewrite your list in order of priority, with the intention of doing higher priority tasks first and working your way down the list. You will usually find that a lot of this is done for you if you keep in mind the due dates for the different projects you're working on. How you prioritize is your own business. No one can tell you what is most important to you. Just be responsible with your priorities.

Try not to overestimate your capabilities. Do not leave projects for the last second. We've all done our share of procrastinating, but in the long run it is usually the least effective way of getting work done. It will happen, but try to keep the last-minute scramble to a minimum.

C. Scheduling

Now that you've got a prioritized list of everything that you need and want to do, you should look at your class-work schedule to fit your projects around what you already have scheduled. Again, this is something good to do for a few days at a time rather than every day. Remember to let your schedule be flexible. Don't get overly ambitious--there's no need to plan out every minute of your day. Make a reasonable

schedule that you can be sure to stick to. Be sure to leave room for breaks, socializing, and those little things that tend to pop up.

Following these three steps with the help of some time management skills will help you use your time more effectively, and a little more time is something we could all use!

Adapted from: *Time Management for Leaders*. M. Finley, SODC, University of Michigan

Time Management Skills

After you have made your lists of things to do and prioritized them, the real challenge to managing your time rears its ugly head. The real challenge in effectively managing your time is the process of monitoring, analyzing and revising your plan until it works. Some of the skills you will need to make your chosen method of time management succeed are:

- A. Patience
- B. Analysis
- C. Flexibility
- D. Awareness
- E. Information

A. Patience

One of the most important things to keep in mind if you're struggling with time management is that effective planning is a skill that takes time to acquire, to practice and to polish. You will not sit down one day and suddenly have a perfect strategy. You may fail at your first attempt to manage your time. Some frustration is inevitable and even to be expected but don't let this keep you from trying.

The process of time management does not end with the creation of some lists. At first it may seem that you're getting less done than before because planning and monitoring can seem time-consuming. To make your strategy work iron out the details in your time plan at the beginning of the semester when the pressure and workload are at a minimum. The trial and error approach of trying out strategies, seeing them fail, and then trying something else are essential parts of the process. If you can endure the first few weeks, later in the semester you'll reap the benefits when you need them the most.

B. Analysis

A vital part of having a successful time management strategy is self-analysis. To develop your time management skills you need feedback but in the case of time management there is no one to monitor your efforts at using time effectively other than yourself. For this reason, set aside a few minutes each day to evaluate how your time plan is working. Determine whether tasks have been accomplished or not, and figure out why. Have you simply over or underestimated how much can be done in a study session? Do you permit people to interrupt what you are doing to socialize or can you stay focused? Your thoughtful analysis of the reasons why your time plan

works or does not work is the key to the continuous improvement of your skills. Remember to examine what works as well as what didn't work.

C. Flexibility

Your time plan will be most successful if you remember that it is not written in stone. You are subject to all the same diseases, disasters and distractions as the rest of the population, so cultivate the sensitivity to know when you're being productive and when you're beating your head against the wall, and take appropriate action. Don't stop writing your essay in the middle of a great idea because you only scheduled an hour for it. Learn to recognize when putting a task off and doing something else is an intelligent, conscious decision and when it is just procrastinating. Sometimes, walking away for a project for a few minutes can be the best thing to bringing a new perspective to a problem or to returning your focus. Be gentle with yourself if you fall short of your expectations, but monitor any negative patterns that emerge and analyze their source. By expecting the unexpected and building flexibility into your time plan, you'll have a better chance of achieving your goals.

D. Awareness

To be successful at time management, it is necessary to be strategic. This involves several steps. First, you *plan* - in this instance how you will use your time. Second, you *monitor* - is this working? Am I achieving what I planned to do? How am I enjoying this? How difficult is it? Third, you *analyze* - why did or didn't this plan work? If it did work, you look at where or how else effective strategies can be used. If the plan didn't work, you develop new strategies and try them out. The common denominator of all these steps is *awareness* of the importance of time management, of how you are using your time, and of what works or doesn't work for you.

E. Information

Learning to manage time is an ongoing process. The more aware you are of how other people use their time, the more quickly you will see and pick up new strategies. The bigger your repertoire of time management strategies, the easier it will be to adapt to new challenges, such as working around exams or a thesis, or the time management situations a full-time job and family life may bring. Keep your eyes open, listen when people talk about how time is used, and keep trying out new methods and techniques. The ability to manage time effectively is a very valuable asset to have in the working world. If you can master time management in the stressful, unstructured environment of the university, you can be confident of your ability to manage time in almost any situation after graduation.

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