

## Time Management for Today's Workplace Demands

by Bill Thomack, RN, BSN, COHN-S

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As the work force decreases, the workload remains the same or, in many cases, increases. An effective employee must arrange work time to accomplish what needs to be done in the time available. The best way to manage time is to set a goal, develop a plan, and measure the outcome. To manage time requires determining where time is currently spent, taking time at the end of the day to prepare for the next morning, managing appointments, carefully planning projects, and managing phone, electronic, and paper mail. Organization is another step in effectively managing time. An organizational system decreases wasted time. Keeping the desk clear and creating a system to organize mail improves efficiency. Time management also focuses on balance, an overall purpose, and supporting principles. Personal or professional effectiveness does not depend solely on the effort expended, but whether the effort is in the right direction. The challenge of time management is to manage not only time, but also oneself.

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It seems as if every article about time management begins with the phrase, "we are all being asked to do more with less." This observation is as true today as it was 5 or even 10 years ago. As the work force decreases, the workload remains the same or increases. However, nobody can do it all. For individuals to not only survive but also excel, time must be managed well and priorities established (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2008).

Time management is the ability to use time to get things done when they should be done. To be effective, time must be used to ac-

complish what must be done in the time available (Mosley, Megginson, & Pietri, 1997). Individuals who are skilled in time management use their time efficiently and effectively, valuing the time they have. When efforts are concentrated on the highest priorities, more is done in less time, thus enabling these workers to attend to a broader range of activities. Individuals who are not skilled in time management are disorganized and waste time and resources. They erratically move from task to task with little purpose and fail to set priorities. These individuals cannot say no but they can only concentrate on one task or issue at a time. They are easily distracted and react to the "hot" issue of the moment. They have no plan or method for managing their time (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2008).

### GOALS

The best way to manage time is to set a goal, develop a plan, and measure the outcome. Without goals, it is impossible to set priorities. Taking the time to plan and set priorities, rather than simply diving into a project or task, actually saves time. Based on goals, tasks can be separated into what must be done, what could be done if time permits, and what need not be done. Successful time managers begin with a plan for available time and then manage within that time. Those skilled in time management set deadlines and tackle their most difficult projects at the time of day they are at their best. Easy tasks are done during the times when energy or focus is low. Effective time management requires resisting the urge to follow plans guided by what an individual likes or does not like to do. Establishing a list of points to be covered results in more productive phone calls, e-mails, and meetings. Others will appreciate efforts to use their time efficiently. Ineffective time managers are unable to end a transaction with others. They either continue to talk beyond what is necessary or cannot close the conversation with the contact. Developing skills in courteously terminating a conversation is essential to effective time management (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2008).

The first step in effective time management is to determine where time is currently spent using a time log. Effective time managers spend their time on activities that provide

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Thomack is Nurse Case Manager, Matrix Absence Management, Phoenix, AZ.

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E-mail: wthomack@gmail.com.

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## Sidebar

**Cell Phone Management**

- Be selective when sharing cell phone numbers
- Turn off cell phone to avoid interruption
- Establish time parameters for availability via cell phone
- Schedule time for returning calls and text messages
- Monitor time spent on cell phone to avoid wasted time

the most significant contribution to achieving their goals. Activities to be completed in a given day are listed in order of priority. Activities that are most important or critical to current goals can be classified as “A.” Activities that are still important but not as critical as “A” activities can be classified as “B.” Activities that have a low priority and are relatively unimportant are classified as “C.” Individuals who are most time efficient spend the greatest portion of their time working on “A” activities (Mosley et al., 1997).

Many activities completed during the day are time wasters, including routine work that someone else could handle. Learning to delegate jobs that can be done by others permits time to focus on critical or difficult tasks. Procrastinating or being overwhelmed by large jobs are also time wasters. Breaking large jobs into smaller parts and completing the more unpleasant parts first can break through the procrastination barrier. Time is also wasted by permitting others to interrupt. One effective time-management technique is simply closing the office door or keeping books or other items on extra chairs to prevent visitors from sitting down. Some occupational health nurses advocate standing until visitors leave or going to the work area of others so that departing is easily accomplished. Setting deadlines for decisions and making decisions as soon as all the facts are available also prevent wasted time. Using daily planners or filing systems to stay organized is an essential time-management technique. Handling papers only once, writing short notes directly on original documents, and forwarding these

documents to select individuals eliminates clutter and increases efficiency. Keeping a neat desk and facing the desk away from the view of others can minimize distractions and associated wasted time (Mosley et al., 1997).

Another way to save time is to use 5 minutes at the end of the day to straighten the work area and organize for the next day. Taking a few minutes to determine the first tasks for the next day, prioritizing them, and leaving a list of priorities in the center of a cleared desk will support an efficient start to the next day. Taking time at the end of the day to plan the next day provides the opportunity to reflect positively on the day’s accomplishments. Further, it sends a signal to the subconscious mind that work is over for this day, making it easier to start tasks, already organized, in the morning (St. James, 2001).

Appointments and meetings can consume time. When making appointments, determining the length of each appointment will create a realistic schedule. Additionally, factors such as getting to and from the appointment must be taken into account to make scheduling realistic. Successful time managers develop skills for leaving meetings on time when others extend those meetings beyond their established parameters.

Effective time managers also determine whether attendance is necessary at a given meeting. When a conflicting or additional meeting must be added to an already tight schedule, it may be necessary to cancel attendance at another, less-critical meeting. When hosting meetings, developing an agenda, establishing realistic

time frames for each agenda item, and managing meeting time frames will be appreciated by other attendees. Many effective time managers try to avoid scheduling meetings or appointments early in the day so they will not disrupt morning routines.

Research has shown that most workers are too overwhelmed to take breaks. Scheduling breaks and taking them is part of maintaining health and well-being and restoring energy to work efficiently the remainder of the day (St. James, 2001). In addition to scheduling breaks, health and well-being are enhanced by scheduling physical activity into the daily routine; exercise should be scheduled on the calendar to ensure physical fitness goals are met.

Time-consuming projects can be a challenge to managing time efficiently. When planning a project, successful time managers recommend carefully determining how much time the project will take, then doubling that time to allow for unplanned and unexpected delays. Failing to accurately estimate the amount of time for a project adds significant pressure that affects other work and decreases one’s ability to efficiently manage time. Experts suggest delaying a commitment to project deadlines to allow for an uninterrupted period to determine the amount of time for the project and the resources needed to complete the project (St. James, 2001).

**INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

Although modern technology saves time, it also consumes time. Cell phones have enabled 24-hour-a-day availability. Tips for cell phone management are listed in the Sidebar.

Another form of technology that consumes time is electronic mail (e-mail); often workers are not even aware of the time spent on e-mail. However, e-mail can be controlled. Removing an e-mail address from unwanted distribution lists will eliminate undesired e-mail and save time by avoiding the need to read and react to unwanted mail. It may be difficult to tell others not to forward junk e-mail (it may not be “junk” to

them), but many e-mail systems support sorting rules so that mail from select individuals or about select subjects can be shunted to another folder automatically to be read when time is not limited. As with the phone, scheduling a time of day for checking and answering e-mails will improve time management. Establishing e-mail folders supports rapid sorting of e-mails to be retained without adding confusion to the inbox. Scheduling regular e-mail housekeeping (discarding what is not needed) manages e-mail volume.

Individuals who are efficient time managers do not allow the amount of paper coming across their desks to become overwhelming. They handle paper only once and determine what can be eliminated. Duplicate magazines, newspapers, and business reports or ones that are not being read can be cancelled to eliminate unwanted paper. If there is no time to read it, it must not be important. Saving e-mails and electronic information in an electronic folder, rather than as hard copies, facilitates finding and reading them in the future. Ninety percent of the paper kept in files is never accessed again. Having unneeded files increases the time required to find needed items and uses more time (St. James, 2001).

Organization is key to managing time. Developing a system decreases the amount of time wasted looking for documents. Designating a space for everything and keeping everything in its place when not in use is a key principle in Lean Operations, a production practice focused on eliminating waste while preserving value (Mazzocato et al., 2012). Keeping the desk clear except for what is needed for the current task supports focus on current projects. Keeping only one writing tool on the desk eliminates a cluttered work area. A writing tablet or neat stack of paper facilitates note taking. "Snail mail," like e-mail, needs to be handled efficiently. The goal should be to handle mail only once, so adequate time must be set aside to process it when it is opened. If a letter is placed

in the "handle later" file, a note in the time-management system serves as a reminder that the item exists and needs to be tackled (St. James, 2001).

### SELF-MANAGEMENT

Although most time management focuses on prioritizing, to be truly effective it must also focus on balance, an overall purpose, and supporting principles (Covey, 1999). Effectiveness does not depend solely on the effort put forth, but whether the effort is in the right direction. Goals dictate what must be accomplished. Tasks are established and prioritized according to the goals they support. Time management should be centered on organization and execution of priorities. Covey (1989) describes three generations of time-management theory, each building on the one before it. The first generation is characterized by notes and checklists used to provide some organization of the demands placed on time. The second generation is characterized by calendars and appointment books. This represents an attempt to look ahead and schedule events and activities to reach goals. The third generation reflects current time management. It adds the ideas of prioritization, clarifying values, and comparing the worth of activities based on their relationship to those values. The third generation focuses on setting goals and creating targets, using daily planning to develop a specific plan to accomplish goals and activities determined to be of greatest value (Covey, 1989).

A fourth generation of time management has been identified. This generation recognizes that the challenge of time management is not to manage time, but to manage self. It is a function of expectation as well as realization. This generation focuses on preserving and enhancing relationships and accomplishing results rather than focusing on things and time. Activities are defined as urgent and important. Urgent activities require immediate attention. Urgent activities insist on action. Importance has more to do with results. Important activities contribute to high-priority

goals. More initiative is required for important matters and they require proactive attention (Covey, 1989).

Although most time-management planning tools focus on daily activities, most workers think in weeks. Daily planning organizes crises and busywork. Planning in terms of weeks schedules priorities. Planning tools should manage not only schedules, but also people. Dealing with time efficiently requires dealing with people effectively. Planning tools should serve the user; the user should not be a servant of the tools. Tools should be tailored to individual styles and needs. They should be portable and readily available and allow the user to look at the week ahead to schedule time to achieve goals. With "weekly organizing, daily planning becomes more a function of daily adapting, of prioritizing activities and responding to unanticipated events, relationships and experiences in a meaningful way" (Covey, 1989, p. 165).

Regardless of an individual's position, front line or management, to be successful in today's work environment, time-management skills are essential. The key to managing time is using the right tools and developing a plan that allows the individual to complete the tasks necessary to reach established goals.

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