

Time Management For Leaders

Have you ever asked yourself how some people are able to work so many different activities into their schedules while others barely seem to have the time to attend classes? Are they smarter? Doubtful. More organized? Probably. Better at managing time? Likely.

Time management is important to any person, but particularly to student organization members and leaders. Involvement in co-curricular activities means that in addition to classes, homework, meals, jobs, and socializing, another significant amount of time is taken up with organizational obligations. This handout is designed to provide you with some suggestions on how to more effectively manage your time.

It is important to note that time management is a personal skill; only you know your peak work hours, your attention span, your eating and sleeping needs-which must be planned for. Finding a time management strategy that best fits your needs is important. The following steps can help you determine your strategy.

The Big Five

The five steps to effective time management are:

1. Plan
2. Assess
3. Organize
4. Prioritize
5. Schedule

Plan

Research and personal experiences have shown that individuals who set personal goals have a greater chance of success. These individuals have determined, and set on paper what they would like to achieve and how they would like to get there. Their goals are realistic, believable and achievable. People who set goals also evaluate their progress and make any necessary changes on a regular basis. So, if you want to better manage your time, your first step is to set the goals you would like to achieve, either for the semester, year or throughout your college career.

Assess

Your next step is to assess how you are currently using your time. You cannot make productive changes unless you know what areas need to be changed. Keep a time log for three days from the time you get up until the time that you go to bed. Describe your specific activities in 15 minute blocks.

The activity should be detailed (and can include) comments. Prioritize your activities: A-important to you; B-important to others; and C-maintenance (basic human needs). Maintenance items may become A priority items. For example, exercising may be maintenance once it becomes a habit but could be an A priority until then.

Next, analyze your time log. Answer the following questions:

1. Were there any surprises?
2. Would you judge this to be a typical week?
3. What patterns could you identify in your time wasters? Interruptions?
4. What part of the week would you consider most productive? Least productive?
5. What time of the day do you feel was most productive? Least productive?
6. What activities would you like to eliminate totally? What would be the cost of doing so? What is the cost of not eliminating them?
7. Which activities during the week do you deem most rewarding? Would you like to spend more time doing them in the future? What is your plan for doing so?

Have someone review your time log. An objective observer may be able to point out discrepancies or patterns that you did not see.

Organize

Ideally, you should make a list each morning of everything that you want or need to do for that day. Do not plan out every minute and don't even think about which task is most important, just write them all down. Some people find it more helpful to list their "things to do" in 5 to 7 day groupings. In this way they can plan for longer projects and get a better sense of their week. Whichever method you choose, keep in mind that everyone has good and bad days. Don't hide if you don't accomplish everything, just include the uncompleted tasks to your next days list and get them done.

Prioritize

After you have recorded these "things to do", go over the list and rewrite in priority order which things you need to do at the top and less important/pressing tasks at the bottom. Keep in mind due dates, commitments you have made, and whether or not these tasks involve other people. If the items are for class, it is important to consider how much of the final grade they are worth. How you choose to prioritize is a very personal matter. What is important is that you are responsible with your priorities. Review your personal goals-how do these priorities fit with your goals?

Schedule

The last thing to do is to take this list and begin to work these "things to do" into your schedule. You cannot plan every minute of your day. Remember to leave room for breaks, socializing and those unexpected things that pop up. There's no use making a schedule that is impossible to follow.

Many college students find it helpful to keep a schedule book for the year. At the beginning of the semester, write down your classes, assignment due dates and exams. Carry your planner with you if you write your "to do" list in it!

Try these suggestions, see what works for you best, and then be sure to integrate them into your learning lifestyle. Learning effective time management now will help you throughout your personal life and professional career.