

but I don't have the time!

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Extension professional, doctor, lawyer, housewife, student, or church worker—all complain there aren't enough hours in the day to get things done. We know that if you're a professional working in today's society, planning and using your time wisely is a challenge for you. The time squeeze on each professional is a widespread problem, since very few people have learned how to manage their time effectively.

Time is an unusual commodity. You can't *save it*; you can't *borrow it*; you can't *lend it*; you can't *leave it*; you can't *take it*. We can do only two things with it: *use it or lose it*.

Typical Case

Do you know someone like this?

Bob is an Extension agent. One day, as he was planning for a training meeting, he went to the file to get a leader's guide. As he neared the file, he remembered he needed to get his camera from the storeroom. On his way to the storeroom, he saw a poster that needed to be replaced. On his way to get a new poster, he realized his secretary used the last poster a week ago. On the way out the door, he was interrupted by a phone call—the caller wanted the address of one of the Advisory Committee members. As he left the office, he decided he'd go home for lunch and surprise his wife—he was surprised instead since she had gone shopping, and he had to get his own lunch. He returned late, just in time for his meeting, but with no time to prepare, so he decided to get through it by talking more and saying less. His supervisor stopped by unexpectedly to observe his teaching and was quite disturbed. Bob blamed his wife for not being home. His wife blamed the secretary for not calling her in advance. His secretary blamed the office chairman for not helping coordinate the office. The chairman blamed the supervisor for not staying out of the county . . . You can finish the story.

Has this ever happened to you? Or even a part of it?
Are you interested in doing better? If so, read on.

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Time Is a Resource

As employees of our state land-grant universities, we *must consider our time as an economic resource. Time is the dimension in which “change” takes place, just as space is the dimension in which “motion” takes place. Time is a flow from the past to the present to the future, and this flow is one way—not reversible. Time can’t be expanded or contracted. It can’t be recovered or replaced—it’s highly perishable.*

Time is quantifiable (seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years) and is expensive and precious (and becoming more so). Most of what we call “cost” is the *cost of time*.

For Extension professionals, time is probably our most valuable resource! We can learn to get more done in the same time or as much done in less time. The choice is ours. In either case, we’re far ahead when we learn to use our time effectively.

With the demands on the Extension professional today, we must learn to apply various techniques of time management to become more productive and less frustrated. If we can get more done in the same time, then we become more valuable employees, better satisfied, and capable of a higher earning power within our Extension organization. If we can accomplish the same amount of work in *less time*, then we have *more time* for leisure, hobbies, and other outside vocations or interests.

Time Log

One technique to help you appreciate where your time goes and how it’s actually used is to keep a “time log.” You may say that you know where your time goes, but until you actually keep track of how you use your time for 3 or 4 typical days (in 15-minute blocks), you won’t have the total picture. After you’ve kept a time log, then review it carefully to determine where you may have wasted time and how you might regroup to become more efficient.

The time log is an excellent technique to indicate what activities took your time, what activities repeatedly took large amounts of time, and the “balances” between time allotted to priority and nonpriority work. It will also help you quickly identify planned and unplanned time. We’ll share specific techniques for you to consider in saving time a bit later.

Attitude

Your attitude toward your work and the methods you use to achieve your planned goals are of utmost importance when discussing time management or time planning. Research studies and practical solutions for improving your work habits won’t help if you’re satisfied with or enjoy your present system of work. It has been said that “ordinary people think merely how they shall *spend* their time. A person of intellect tries to *use* it.”

The demand for an Extension professional's time is varied and complex. Additional programs, new activities, more reports, more surveys—just to name a few—often cause concern and frustration. With more things added to the work load—and seldom are things ever dropped, Extension professionals must become more effective and efficient in their program leadership through better time management.

Analyze Your Situation

We recommend that you analyze your situation. Are you planning and using your time effectively? Let's take a look at some symptoms of ineffective time planning:

1. Constantly slipping deadlines.
2. Lack of time for people to see you.
3. Winding up the day with a sense of frustration and a feeling that you haven't accomplished anything.
4. Work is a succession of crash deadlines and crises.

Sense of Awareness

A sense of awareness is the first step. Do you recognize any of these or similar symptoms in your Extension work? If you do, you're lucky because you're aware of a need for improving the ways you use your time.

When you aren't performing as you should, you'll know it, and the symptoms will be very clear:

1. People yet to be seen.
2. Letters yet to be answered.
3. Important or urgent projects not yet touched.
4. Work to be done at night after dinner.
5. Phone calls to be made or returned.
6. A sinking feeling of futility.
7. The despairing fatigue that goes along with frustration.

Remember: you may have had a "busy day," but this may not be the same as a "productive one." All kinds of "busy work" interruptions and unforeseen blockages may have stalled accomplishing the things you set out to do that day. Keep in mind: "It's not the hours that you put in—it's what you put in the hours."

Various studies indicate that the 10 most common sources of time losses are built around:

1. Poor use of telephone.
2. Inefficient meetings.
3. Long or unnecessary reports.
4. Unplanned visits.
5. Lack of delegation.
6. Procrastination.
7. Fire fighting.
8. Special requests.
9. Delays.
10. Slow or unnecessary reading.

According to some of the leading management consultants in America today, the *three most common time wasters* are the *telephone*, *drop-in visitors*, and *meetings*, both scheduled and unscheduled.

Self-Organization

Self-organization is another important step in time management. Most people who have difficulty in completing their work on schedule are guilty of one or more of these faults (1) lack of planning, (2) failure to delegate, or (3) involvement with small or trifling details.

We're creatures of habit and tend to keep on doing things the same way even though times and conditions have changed. We often fail to seriously consider what's important and what isn't. We also tend to do things that others could do better or easier. Often we schedule our work in the wrong sequence, perform unnecessary steps of the task, and, many times, work with the wrong people.

One of the best techniques for organizing your Extension work is to write down the six most important tasks you have to do tomorrow and number them in order of importance. List these tasks on a note card or paper, put the list in your pocket or purse, and, the first thing tomorrow, start your day with the first item and follow through before moving to the second. Don't worry if you haven't finished at the end of the day—you wouldn't even have known which to do first if you hadn't used this system.

When planning your "tasks for tomorrow," make sure that you'll be spending your time on the right tasks. Are you working on things that contribute to your Extension work goals? Qualify the things you plan to do, before you do them, and make sure they're worthwhile. Are the efforts you're planning likely to help you reach your work goals?

Remember, we said time is the most valuable resource we have. Each of us has the same amount of it. Time is neither storable nor retrievable, loanable nor borrowable. It must and will be spent on something. The question is how will we spend it and how will we invest what has been given to us?

One of the best ways to be more efficient and effective is to get off to the right start each day physically and psychologically.

To improve your self-organization, ask yourself: Do I . . .

Before leaving home:

- Get up late?
- Linger in bed before getting up?
- Forget to prepare the night before?
- Read the paper in the morning?
- Linger over an extra cigarette or coffee at breakfast?

After leaving home:

- Stop off to socialize before I reach my desk?
- Take my morning coffee before starting?
- Do personal work before doing my livelihood work?
- Read newspapers, trade journals, unimportant reports, and information documents first?

Throughout the day:

- Socialize between tasks?
- Start slowly because of lack of interest?
- Procrastinate because of other interests?
- Start a task without first thinking it through?

If you can say “no” to all of the above, then you’re an efficient manager of your time.

Techniques

Reading and paperwork are big time-consumers. To improve in this area, try some screening.

Reading/ Paperwork

For paperwork, ask:

- Is it required?
- Is it pertinent?
- Is it of interest?

If not, toss it.

In reading, do you:

- Screen your reading materials to weed out unnecessary or unproductive matter?
- Skim the surface of the reading matter for main ideas?
- Practice rapid reading techniques to improve speed and comprehension?

Don’t be a paper shuffler! Pick it up, act on it, and eliminate that continual shuffling.

Visitors

Office callers are among the greatest consumers of an Extension professional’s time. Whatever the priority, you must carefully budget your time if you’re to be totally effective.

To improve your office time effectiveness, you might consider the following:

1. Set up regular conference periods with your co-workers and accumulate items for discussion at that time.
2. Hold regular staff meetings and take up matters of common concern from all sides (accumulate between meetings).
3. Hold occasional breakfast or luncheon meetings to remove pressure of social visits by various publics.
4. Encourage use of other media—telephone, office mail system, etc., when personal visits aren’t necessary.

Writing Writing can also be a waste and time-consumer. Here are some ways to improve in this area:

1. Make simple outlines for letters and reports, and more detailed outlines for major writing tasks.
2. Use a simple, direct style communication, getting right to the point.
3. Make use of form letters and form paragraphs for routine correspondence.

Delegating Is deciding on what you can and cannot *delegate* a problem? The following list may help you decide how you're doing:

1. Items that can be delegated:
 - a. Fact finding and analysis.
 - b. Formulating goals—not final determination.
 - c. Preparing first drafts.
 - d. Performing routines and carrying out details.
 - e. Tasks others can do better, sooner, cheaper.
 - f. Representing you at meetings, conferences, etc., where your points of view can be exposed.
 - g. Tasks that will help subordinates develop through exposure.
 - h. Tasks after decisions are made.

Note: A key point in delegation is to hold your staff more accountable for results instead of methods.

2. Items That Can't Be Delegated:
 - a. Making final decisions—deciding on goals, etc.
 - b. Executing tasks where goals aren't clear.
 - c. Hiring, discipline, firing of immediate staff.
 - d. Unique or highly personalized tasks that won't come up again.
 - e. Things that must be kept absolutely secret.
 - f. Personal representation where your presence is important.
 - g. Emergency, short-term tasks where there isn't time to explain.

Summary In summary, to improve our time management and time use, we must:

1. Recognize the problem (if we don't realize we have a problem, nothing will help).
2. Be willing to change.
3. Analyze the way we're presently spending our time (keep a time log).
4. Ask ourselves why we did the things we did—were the time blocks related to our work goals?

5. Work from a list each day.
6. Select our “tasks for tomorrow” that will contribute to our Extension work goals.

Overall, there is one underlying force for good time management that is more powerful than all others. That force is “self-discipline.” Before you can master time . . . you must master yourself.

It really doesn't matter who you are—Extension agent or secretary, man or woman, programmer or administrator, time will always be at a premium. For you, as for us, *time is the root*, and *life is the fruit*. How well you live your life is a direct result of how well you use your time. Your future is in your hands—plan and use it carefully and wisely because “it's where we all will spend the rest of our lives!”