

# time for people and creativity

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- I don't seem to have time to talk and listen to people anymore.
- There's never enough time to get everything done, let alone think about expanding our Extension programs or creating a new one.
- All I have time to do is jump from one crisis to another.
- My rapport with youth and adults is suffering because I don't have time to devote to people.
- Extension paper work is getting me down.

If you find yourself thinking these thoughts or having these experiences, then time management is for you. Extension professionals are faced with a dilemma—they have a large number of details to attend to and yet they must be people oriented. There are volumes of paper work and hundreds of youth and adults that require attention. How do I do them both and feel good about having done them successfully? Organization and time management are the keys to my success. The development and constant use of these skills are a must. If you want to feel good about yourself, your clientele, your co-workers, your friends, your job, then you owe it to yourself to get organized and plan your time carefully.

How do I do that?

There are lots of fun things to try. Some techniques work better for some people, other techniques for others. Here are some that have worked for me, and have allowed me to be on top of things and be a "people person" too.

## **Personal "To-Do" List**

My "to-do list" is my road map. I keep it on my desk at all times. It's a notebook where I list all things I have to do. The priority completion dates are listed in the column to the right. I also have a column to check when the task is done. Each day I update my list and refer to it often to keep me on the right track. The notebook idea works much better than individual notes scattered all over my desk.

## **Secretary's "To-Do" List**

One of the most important people on our Extension team is my secretary. For her to be effective and have time to do all I need done, she must be informed. She must understand

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*what* I want done, *how* I want it done, and *when* I want it done. It's my responsibility to help her.

A "list" that works well for us has the following column headings: work project, date submitted, date needed, date completed, and number of copies. Each task needing secretarial attention is recorded on this list. It lets my secretary know my priorities, keeps her work organized, and is helpful as a reference when I forget whether I've done a particular task.

Secretaries that work for more than one person find it even more crucial to use such a tool. It can also be a talking point when time conflicts arise. The secretary can alert you when there may be too much expected by a certain date. Reevaluation of priorities can then be done realistically rather than waiting until both of you are under pressure. Behind every successful Extension worker is an equally successful secretary.

## **Filing Procedures**

Filing begins the minute you put your hands on a piece of correspondence. I try very hard to handle a piece of correspondence only once—the initial contact. If it requires response from me, I note it on my "to-do list" and then code it (in top right-hand corner) according to the filing key for my secretary to file. If it doesn't require a response, but is only for my information, I scan the contents, code it for the file, and again set aside for my secretary to file.

If the material is to be used for a program or something coming up in the near future, it's marked "top-drawer file" and put in the file basket. When my secretary files this piece, she places it in one of the current files in my desk. These files are kept until the program or event has been completed, then the file is transferred to the regular filing system.

Filing for retrieval is important, otherwise why file? Some Extension workers prefer to let the secretary code the material for them. I prefer to do my own, since I often have to retrieve items from the file and I'm more likely to know the category I put it in.

If you find it necessary, in your job, to be able to retrieve material from file drawers to answer questions while on the phone, it's important that you can reach them while talking. Part of my job responsibility is to help our 4-H staff with questions they have about the state 4-H program. Obviously, keeping all those details in my head is not only impossible, but not desirable. Thus, the filing system becomes extremely important. When a call comes in and I need material in the file, I'm able, because of the placement of my files, to reach any drawer while I'm talking. A long telephone cord helps me to quickly get to filed material and give a response. Not only do I use my time more effectively, but also the time of the person calling. Quick, accurate replies are greatly appreciated

and it helps your credibility. Extension is “people work” and time is precious to us all.

### Think Process

Are you working from one crisis to the next? Are you giving careful thought to what you’re putting yourself through as well as those around you? There are times in Extension when *the best developed plans and all the organization in the world* just doesn’t seem to work. But, it’s my belief that those situations can be kept to a minimum if your “think process” is working all of the time.

When a problem arises, you need to be alert to key questions like: How do I tackle this? What shall I do first? What’s the order in which I need to work? What kind of follow-through do I need? Do I need an evaluation process? Who do I need to work with? How much time do they have? How will they feel about it?

In Extension, we must constantly remind ourselves that in most situations we’re working with *other people*. Perhaps it’s co-workers, volunteers, young people, or families. Each of us has the same number of hours in a day and everyone is busy. Wasting our time and theirs is unfair. We, of all people, should be able to work in a systematic way, putting like tasks together, identifying priorities, organizing resources, and helping people through a group process that will enable the entire group to feel good about what they’re doing—you included.

### Summary

If I can save just a few precious minutes each day by following these ideas, I’ll be a better person. I’ll be more at ease. I’ll know what my road map says and how to follow it. Hopefully I’ll be able to keep the “feeling level” high as I deal with people in my job—and maybe even gain a few private moments for myself to appreciate the beauty around me.