

t 'n t: time management for paraprofessionals

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- *No idea is more varied or more complex than that of time.*
- *Time is the most valuable resource we have—each of us has exactly the same amount every day.*
- *The choice is how we spend time; how we invest what has been given to us.*
- *Time is money!*

Can Extension program assistants improve their job productivity—get more work done in their time on the job—by improving the way they manage their time? Or are workshops on time management useful only for corporate executives?

A substantial portion of Extension's outreach is accomplished by the large work force of paraprofessionals. Improving their time use is important because of today's concerns for accountability, maximizing effective use of personnel, money, and other resources. The Extension Service, like other educational agencies, is trying to improve the quality of its programs with little additional funding. Improving time management skills of its personnel is one way to accomplish this goal.

Making the Intangible Tangible

How can the intangible concept "time management" be converted into practical, usable tools for paraprofessionals with limited formal education and little awareness of the need to use time carefully? Florida's *Time and Tillie* training program for EFNEP¹ program assistants met this challenge. Our charge was to provide an agenda and materials specifically designed for paraprofessionals, but which could readily be adapted for use with other audiences. *Time and Tillie*, or *T 'n T*, focused on a unique task-level approach to improving program aides' management of this scarce resource.

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In reviewing the available management literature, we found little that applied to paraprofessionals. Most time management strategies were developed for people at the professional or executive level, although task-level job analysis was available for housework and for production line jobs. *T 'n T* combined these two frameworks to help the aides improve their time management abilities.

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Pinpointing the Problem

We knew the comprehensive EFNEP county reviews had revealed the aides' lack of awareness of time as a resource and the role of time management as a means to improve productivity. We developed a questionnaire to identify the specific problems the aides felt they were having in meeting job expectations. An advisory committee of supervising agents and aides provided additional insights into the nature of the difficulty. Responses were obtained in a teleconference, which pinpointed these problem areas:

- The allocation of time among different job components.
- The difficulty in teaching lessons in the time allocated for teaching sessions.
- The preparation of reports and written records in time allocated.

Other concerns mentioned were: controlling the amount of time spent with homemakers, the role of commitment in job accomplishment and satisfaction, and the usefulness of evaluation as work progresses. In all the problems cited, we decided that the common factors involved were attitudes, degree of control, and strategies for alternative solutions.

Materials, Methods, Management

The workshop agenda progressed from time as an abstract concept, to time and the person, to time on the job (see Table 1). We designed the initial phase of the *T 'n T* program to center on the value of time as currently used. A slide set, "Time Makes the Difference," and related exercises highlighted the uniqueness of time in relation to other resources.

In the second part of the training, we helped the aides see these common factors from a managerial perspective. Tillie, star of the slide set "Time 'n Tillie," represented a typical aide whose job consists of training, planning and giving lessons, organizing travel, recruiting homemakers and volunteers,

Table 1. Time management training agenda for Extension program assistants.

Introduction and Objectives
Time Makes the Difference (slide presentation) Time as a feeling, a measure, a resource.
How Do You Use Your Time Now? (aide activity) Current time use and attitudes.
Time as a Resource (information session) Concepts of time as limited, useful, and necessary.
How Do You Feel About Time? (aide activity) Personal feelings and perceptions about the passage of time.
Control of Time (group discussion) Analysis of the degree of control of various job tasks and situations.
T 'n T—Time and Tillie (slide presentation) The time management process explained by Mother Time.
How To Manage Time (group discussion) Applying the management process.
The Time of Millie's Life (case study) Problem-solving discussion for an imaginary aide with management difficulties.
Take Time To Make Time (information session) Practical strategies for managing time more effectively.
Managing Each Part of Your Job (aide activity) Job analysis, priority setting, and commitment for improvement.
What Time Management Skills Have You Learned Today? Evaluation of workshop.

referring people to other agencies, and preparing reports and family records. Tillie's initial complaint to Mother Time, her mentor, was that ever since she became an Extension program assistant, she had been "running behind time."

In the workshop, Tillie learned many ways to use her time better. Mother Time demonstrated the application of the management process to Tillie's work. She traced typical on-the-job situations through the problem identification, planning, acting, and evaluating stages. She emphasized ways to determine the degree of control Tillie has over various task areas and to develop a problem-solving approach in decision making. Various exercises and resource materials strengthened the application of the intangible management concept to everyday job activities. (see Table 2).²

To summarize these concepts, a case study of another aide, Millie, was used. The aides analyzed Millie's work habits and planned a course of action to help Millie improve her managerial skills.

Table 2. Example of job analysis exercise.

Activity 3

CONTROL OF TIME

In order to effectively *use* time, we must be able to determine the degree of *control* we have of various situations or aspects of our work. *Control* means whether you, the aide, are the one who directs the final action. Make your selection based on your situation at the present time. Check one category in each of the "degree of control" columns.

Directions: Check the degree of control you have over these various aspects of your work.

Job tasks and situations	Degree of control				Comments or notes
	A lot	Some	A little	None	
Enrolling new homemakers					
Homemakers not interested					
Teaching methods used					
Homemakers not home					
Making contact visits					
Aide's schedule for the week					
Homemaker sick					
Scheduling lesson with homemaker					
Subject taught to homemaker					
TV turned on loud					
Reminding homemakers about meetings					
Aide's travel schedule					
Reports required					

**T'n T:
A Dynamite
Program**

Pretests and posttests were administered to measure changes in awareness of the value of time and understanding of management concepts. All participants significantly increased their knowledge of the management process and causes of time management problems. At the conclusion of the workshop, each aide completed a worksheet indicating her commitment to improve in at least three areas with which she was having problems. Six months later, we polled the aides to determine the level of change they felt had taken place since the training. The results, based on the aides assessment of their own progress were highly favorable, as Table 3 indicates.

Table 3. Percentage of aides reporting progress in specific problem areas in six-month follow-up survey.

Problem area	Percentage reporting progress (N=65)
Actively participating in in-service training	97%
Developing lessons for homemakers	91
Referring homemakers to other Extension programs and community agencies	89
Organizing travel to minimize mileage	88
Preparing reports	87
Teaching homemakers in groups	86
Presenting lessons to homemakers effectively	85
Recruiting volunteers	70

In addition, supervising agents noted these improvements: increased awareness of the value of time, improvement in lessons presented, increased number of group meetings, development of task shortcuts, increased self-confidence, and continued interest in improving time management skills. These agents are reinforcing the training with additional sessions designed to help each aide continue to improve job productivity.

The *T 'n T* task-level approach to time management has helped the program assistants make an easier transition to accelerated work load requirements and has facilitated the immediate application of time management strategies to solving other existing problems.

Footnotes

1. EFNEP stands for Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program.
2. These materials are available on request from: Marie Hammer, Building 87, IFAS, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.