

Four Principles of Time Management

“All we have to decide is
what to do with the time that is given us.”
Gandalf, *Lord of the Rings*

We don't manage time. We manage our choices and actions.

A lack of time and money is a symptom of choices we have made. So, you will have to decide what you are willing to stop doing or do differently. What are the barriers to making those difficult choices? How much are they, and how much are us?

You start first by figuring out how much time you have: What is the size of today's bottle? This tells you how much you can put in the bottle. If you start with the size of the vat, you will just make yourself sick and crazy. Everything has to have a deadline.

You can manage your activities because you make choices. You make choices because you set priorities. You can set priorities because you have a plan based on your principles. If the plan is in your head, you can't manage your activities.

Quality/Resources/Time equals good/cheap/fast. We need to know the ratios inherent in our commitments to others, projects, departments, and strategic plans, etc. Hopefully, you and your colleagues agree on the ratios.

More With Less: Successful Time Management Practices

Tuesday, June 16th, 2009—News Division—SLA—Washington, DC
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Management Cheat Sheet For Special Librarians

(with attention to News Division issues)

1. Every day is new. Set your goals for that day, and depending on your users' deadlines, reset goals every two hours, or even on the hour.
2. You have to give yourself breaks to pause, step back, and check in. On very busy days, once an hour is good.
3. Most multi-tasking does not work so good, giving us the illusion of progress because we feel so busy.
4. Even if you are an "auditory" communicator, you write things down for the sake of your colleagues, if nothing else.
5. Establish *defaults* for your regular customers.
6. Establish *ratios* for your regular customers: good, cheap, fast.
7. Tell the truth; do the *I will try* litmus test. If you stop saying *I will try* and say only what you will do, what changes?
8. Planning is stronger than willpower: decide what you are not going to do that day. What kind of activity diets do you need?
9. What is something that other people think you can give away and stop doing? You are too close to decide; ask for advice.
10. Who is someone you might have to tick off, who you have been placating up to now?
11. What is a method you are using to do your work or a tool that you are using, which you need to change?
12. What is something you are counting on that needs to be evaluated?
13. What is a habit that you are proud of or that you justify that needs to be stopped, as a test of its usefulness?
14. What is something new you need to learn?
15. Who do you need to renegotiate with?
16. What sacred cows do you need to challenge?
17. What are the things you do that no one would notice if you stopped?

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Tricks of the Trade

1. Start each day with a plan on a 3 by 5 card: Three items.
2. If you don't cross everything off, next day: Two items.
3. If you don't cross both items off, next day: One item.
4. Set arbitrary deadlines for tasks as a way of checking how long they really take.
5. Set time limits on daily tasks, and slowly shrink them. You might speed up a little and get more done.
6. Perfectionists: Do reality checks on if what you are doing perfectly needs to be done perfectly, or if you are stealing money and time from the budget and schedule to satisfy deep, unnatural urges.
7. Throw out lots of stuff. Wait a year; if not one asks for anything, throw out the other stuff.
8. Beware the drug of social media rationalizations.
9. Don't isolate yourself. Even if you are a solo librarian, find someone to check in with daily on your progress.
10. Anticipate repetitive routines and find ways to reduce how much time they take, for example, by batching work.
11. Partner with the library users whom you have the *best* relationships. Learn to work together to make how you deliver services more efficient and effective: don't take those relationships for granted.
12. Partner with the users whom you have indifferent or neutral relationships, and invest in improving so you can negotiate.
13. Figure out if you can stop serving someone who you can never please. Decide not to get sucked into the martyr reference relationship.
14. Do risk management analyses on things you check twice or more: What is the cost of failure versus the cost of hours of back-ups?
15. At some point you will have to say no. Are you prepared?

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Activity Management *Mistakes*

1. Project creep: Adding new components that fall outside of the limits of the activity's plan, especially without removing equivalent components.
2. Falling into habitual ways of doing tasks without a process of constant evaluation.
3. Pet projects: Becoming possessive about one's tasks, even when someone else can do them better or it is no longer relevant (or as relevant) to the needs of the information center user.
4. Turning down valid help, even if it is not perfect or not your way.
5. Not setting reasonable limits on quality: trying to make everything perfect.
6. Not creating networks of support inside and outside the library.
7. Misrepresenting the cost of completing a task: lying to please.
8. Not paying attend to the Q/\$/T ratios that the user wants.
9. Not actively negotiating Q/\$/T ratios: management by martyrdom.
10. Not taking breaks to refresh and renew.
11. Working obsessively at the task level instead of stopping to work at the management and leadership level: reacting, instead of planning and anticipating.
12. Taking on roles for life, such as chairing committees, bringing coffee, being an archive, representing the union, representing management, running meetings, taking notes at meetings, or fixing a specific problem.
13. Not having written strategic plans that are actually used to make choices.
14. Not having written daily plans to set priorities.
15. Not checking in with your users for advice.
16. Not trying something new on a regular basis, particularly as you become more experienced.
17. Feeling and behaving as if you are entitled, such as not having to justify your actions or assuming automatically you have already earned certain privileges in the past.
18. Isolating yourself from the rest of the library or your greater institution because you are busy; not investing in political relationships.

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