



## **Time Marches On: Mastering Your Time Before It Controls You!**

If you had a choice of having more time or more money, which would you pick? Who doesn't want more money. At the same time, all the money in the world will not buy you more time in your day, your week, your month, your year, or your life. The best option, then is to maximize how you use your time.

Even though you can't get any more hours from a day you can learn to be more productive by managing the time you have. Training yourself to prioritize and to avoid procrastination can lead to a healthier, less stressful, and more enjoyable lifestyle. Gaining control begins by discovering how you currently spend your time.

**Keep a time log.** Try to make brief notations every fifteen minutes throughout the day. Keep the log for two or three weeks.

**Examine and prioritize.** See if time is being wasted on low-priority tasks. One useful system, described in Alan Lakein's book *"How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life,"* assigns each task a priority rating of A, B, or C. Setting aside time to complete lesson plans on Friday may rate an A, making up a test to be used two weeks from now, a B or C. Your focus should be on scheduling time for the "A" tasks. Get "absolute

musts" accomplished early in the day when you have the most energy, and avoid that frantic feeling throughout the day.

**Plan your day.** Setting a direction to your day starts with creating a TO-DO list. Your daily TO-DO list should be limited to 10 prioritized items. You may even want to estimate the time that each task should take and try to stay within that time limit.

## Learn to *JUST SAY NO!*

Ask yourself, “How terrible would it be if I didn’t do this low-priority item?” If the answer is “Not too terrible,” then don’t do it or move it to the next day’s list. Declining additional responsibility might sometimes be the best course of action. “No” is a responsible and reasonable answer. To help you say no, you can:

- Use nonverbal language. Ninety percent of the message you send to another person is in voice tone and body language.
- Be direct and honest.
- Avoid defensiveness—you have the right to your own life and to work out your own plan.
- Be brief. The longer you talk, the more likely you’ll end up saying yes.
- Hesitate for at least 10 seconds before giving a response that will commit you to an action.
- Use the broken record technique. Prepare a response ahead of time, and each time you are asked, replay the response.
- Suggest alternatives.

### **Procrastination**

Procrastination means performing low-priority activities rather than high-priority activities with the intent to avoid doing the high-priority activities. Procrastination results in more work, more pressure, the loss of self-esteem, a loss of control, and health problems. Here are some coping strategies for each of the major reasons people procrastinate:

#### **Completing an unpleasant task:**

- Decide what to do and do it first.
- Delegate the task to someone else.
- Reward yourself after completing the task.
- Set a deadline.
- Work on it for no less than five minutes.

#### **Handling a difficult or overwhelming task:**

- Use positive self-talk (focus on past accomplishments that turned out well).
- Break the job into smaller tasks, and include those tasks each day.
- Ask for help.

#### **Dealing with indecision:**

- Make a list of possible positive and negative results of a decision, and see which list is longer.
- Set up a schedule and a target date for a

decision. Do whatever research you can before the target date. Make your decision on that date.

- Flip a coin! Reflect on how you feel about the outcome. If you feel good, the toss came out the way you wanted the decision to go; if you feel disappointed, you wanted it to go the other way. Now follow your decision.

#### **Conquering a fear of failure:**

- Have realistic goals. No one is perfect, so there will be setbacks.
- Focus on your successes.
- Just do it! It may be difficult, but doing the thing you fear most will help you conquer your fear and improve your self-esteem.
- Plan exactly how you will tackle this project
- Feeling prepared may alleviate the stress that might otherwise hinder your success.

### **Managing Time at Work**

Managing time in your personal life is a good start to managing it in your work life as you will need this balance to minimize stress levels in your life and to maintain control between work and life. Teaching is time intensive but the right strategies helps prevent it from overwhelming your life.

**Maximize technology.** Much of the strategies identified in this document can be done online through the use of google docs; clouds to store and maintain records and other documents; and to complete research and online professional development, often from your classroom or your own home.

**Color-code your grade book.** You'll be amazed how much confusion you avoid when you color code your grade book. Put all matters pertaining to attendance in green, grades in red, other information such as students' names and grade level in black, and special assignments or projects in another color. Labels above the assignment squares indicate what the grade or paper was for and saves searching later.

**Make a schedule.** A schedule can add to your efficiency, but it must be realistic. Don't take on more than one human being can handle in one day.

**Learn to delegate.** Make use of your teacher's aide (if you have one), and be sure to use student volunteers to assist you with routine clerical chores. Remember to say, "THANK YOU" to those who help you in your classroom.

**Write it down.** No one can remember everything. Keep a list and take notes in your calendar or day planner. Organize yourself so that you write everything in one book or calendar.

**Develop a class conduct sheet.** Let students know what is expected of them so that they cannot offer the frail "but you didn't tell me" excuse for misconduct. Send a copy of the sheet home to parents so they know what behavior is expected of their child as well.

**Post signs.** Posters are quick and easy room decorators. Try posting a sign on your room door, "Did you bring your book to class?" Post another sign with the school's daily schedule. It helps keep everyone on track.

**Start an attendance drawer.** You'll find it helpful to keep a separate drawer for daily attendance reports especially when you must

settle a dispute about when someone was absent from your class. In addition to marking the absence in your grade book, prepare a daily report sheet. Place a dash and the number of the period absent beside the person's name.

**Create an absentee center.** Instruct students to go directly to this area after they are absent. Create folders for an assignment list, handouts, and a schedule for making up tests and quizzes. Of course, let students know that you will answer any questions they have after they visit the center.

**Create a tardy notebook.** Instead of grabbing the attendance sheet every time a student arrives late, let them sign in. Place a notebook by the classroom door and instruct students to write their name in the book if they arrive after the bell. You can then mark everyone at the same time once the class has started their day's activities.

**Take advantage of the resources available.** Ask co-workers if they are interested in sharing lesson plans. You can get some great ideas from others even if you aren't teaching the same unit. There are also several ready-made lesson plans available on the internet.

**Develop a code.** Code tests and lesson plans so you will know the date the sheet was made up. When it's out of date or you make a better one, pitch it.

**Find a quiet work area.** It may be difficult, but finding an area to work - at school and at home - without interruptions will increase your concentration and efficiency.

**Don't rush.** Working too quickly is counterproductive; you will spend more time correcting your mistakes later. Do things right the first time.

**Complain effectively.** Analyze what is making your job difficult or impossible, how the problem can be solved, and who has the power to solve it - often that person is you. Complain only to the person or persons with the power to change

the situation. Don't waste time moaning in the faculty lounge; contact your TSTA Campus Representative!

## **Fighting eMail Fatigue**

Technology in our schools has increased the means by which we connect with parents, students, and other professionals. For the most part this is a good thing; however, there are times when the volume of messaging via texts, email, and social media can prove overwhelming for teachers. Emails are quick and easy ways to keep everyone in the loop and social media (within a professional context) can be used to provide additional resources. An active presence using social media is necessary in this day and age; however, like anything else it has to be managed or else it takes increasing amounts of your time to address. Here are some tips to make it more manageable.

**1. Read it once!** This is an old time management technique that has increasing relevance today. Your email box is flooded with emails from parents, students, colleagues, administrators, and many others. Some may require a response of some sort while others may be headed for the trash; therefore, schedule (in writing) a time of day to address emails AND do not open or read them until then. If you open emails, read them, and plan to go back later to respond something may be overlooked or time may slip away and the response doesn't get written.

When you schedule a certain time to respond to emails, you have the opportunity to craft your responses. When you wait until a scheduled time to read them, then you're not using other valuable time to read the same emails. It also puts you in control of the email.

You need to communicate this. Set up automatic replies to emails explaining that you will respond to them at a certain point during the day. This will minimize confusion and frustration on your part and that of the sender. Your most important function during the school day is instruction, not responding to emails.

**2. Avoid putting names (and your name) in the "cc" field!** When we respond to emails, we often "cc" people on them or we may be "cc'd" on some emails. If your emails require someone's attention, then include them in the "to" field. A name in the "cc" field does not necessarily guarantee attention. Encourage your colleagues to do the same with you. None of us want our email boxes filled with mail that has been "cc'd" to us as an FYI. Encourage your colleagues to do the same. Do the same for email you send from work to your own personal email-put it in the "to" field.

**3. Follow-up with a phone call!** Emails are great for keeping a running record of exchanges but when not managed properly, they become ongoing conversations. A follow-up phone call can often consolidate or eliminate many emails. Phone conversations enable both participants to dialogue and clarify intent, content, and expectations that may take many days (or weeks) of emails to get to the same point. Ask yourself, would you rather address an issue with a parent via a string of 50 emails over the course of a week or with one 20-minute phone call?

**4. Put down the smartphone!** I know they're addictive and all of us have the tendency to play with them, text, email, tweet, and FB during meetings (or in the classroom). First, if the person you're communicating with on your smartphone is more important than the people in the meeting (parents, colleagues, or administrators) then it's either not an important meeting or there is an absence of value for the meeting and the participants. In either case, everyone's time is being wasted.

You're more likely to craft better responses to emails sitting in front of a desktop computer rather than on a smartphone or mobile device. Work emails, in particular, need to be well thought out and, for teachers, correct with regard to syntax, spelling, and vocabulary, as they can be a part of your teacher appraisal [Dimension 2.3 Communication on the **T-TESS**].

**5. Keep work and personal emails separate.** Never let personal emails come to your work

account (it's the school district's account, they own it, they control it, and they can access it at will) and never let work emails spill over into your personal or down time. Keep the two separate. Everyone needs a break from work—even teachers!

Emails are here to stay and they have become a necessary part of our lives and work. Keep in mind, though, they are tools and another means of communication. Keep control of them and keep them in the context of the primary purpose of your work - teaching!