

Time management



A HANDBOOK FOR YOUTH SERVICE MANAGERS

Produced by the Youth Action & Policy Association

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Introduction

“You can be very busy without being effective. What’s important is to learn how to do what matters most.” Hyrum W Smith, Chairman and CEO, Franklin Que

Many people in the community sector have problems getting the amount of work done that they would like to. Many services receive inadequate funding, considering what they are expected to achieve.

As a result many workers end up working overtime (without pay). Continually working overtime in a job results in worker resentment, and sends a message to funding bodies that they don’t really need to adequately fund community organisations. It undermines the efforts of all other community groups to become properly resourced.

However most people need to feel that they actually achieve something at work, and time management skills can help in that area. **Remember, everyone has a right to a personal life and a family life, so get organised and get out of the office!**

Time management skills will increase your productivity and lessen stress because you will gain a feeling of control. Hopefully you will experience increased job satisfaction because you will be achieving realistic outcomes in realistic time frames.

Time Management is about doing what is most important. Time Management skills will help you to prioritise and focus on your work tasks, and provide quality time for supporting your staff.

To begin, take the quiz on the next two pages to assess your current strengths and weaknesses in time management. Once you have finished the quiz pick 2 or 3 areas that you want to focus on.

The rest of this handbook will provide you with some strategies to deal with the issues you identified.

Time Management Quiz	Always true ☺ ☺	Usually true ☺	OK	Often untrue ☹	Help! ☹ ☹
1) My organisation has a yearly (strategic) plan					
2) I have a yearly workplan which identifies timeframes					
3) I prioritise my work every day					
4) I feel positive about coming to work each day					
5) I tackle the most difficult/unpleasant job first each day					
6) I don't need to be reminded about tasks that I have promised to do – I do what I have promised					
7) I say no to additional work when I get too busy					
8) My time in lieu is kept under control (less than 5 hrs)					
9) I have had a holiday of one week or more in the past six months					
10) I have a lunch break, morning/afternoon tea break every day – away from my desk					
11) I don't talk about work during my breaks					
12) I arrive at meetings on time					
13) I meet my deadlines					
14) My desk is tidy, I have one task on my desk top					
15) My filing, emails and computer files are in order					
16) It takes me less than 30 seconds to find something I need (ie a report)					
17) Staff know where I am when I am out of the office					
18) Staff know what tasks I work on when in the office					
19) I am not on any unnecessary mail or email lists					
20) When delegating tasks I take time to fully explain what I need					
21) I get all of my tasks done for my management committee / supervisor each month					
22) Staff do not panic or bombard me when they see me leave the office					
23) Staff do not frequently interrupt me with small questions					
24) I have regular, productive supervision meetings with my staff. We have supervision notes/follow up.					
25) I have regular, productive meetings with my supervisor					
26) I have regular, productive team meetings with my staff (at least fortnightly)					
27) I do not attend unnecessary meetings when a phone call or email will do					
28) I am not frequently interrupted by gossipers, complainers or uninvited guests					
29) I schedule my meetings times together to cut down travel time					
30) There is a quiet time at our office when we do not interrupt each other					

10 strategies for time management

1. Work out what your goals are, both in your working life and in your personal life. This is important, so write them down. Write down the steps that are needed in achieving those goals.
2. Write down all the things you have to get done, in your work life and your home life. Don't forget to include things which will get you closer to your long term goals.
3. Recognise that you can't get everything done. It may be difficult to adjust to, but you will never get through everything; you can never read every piece of correspondence, be on top of every government policy, or be on every committee – it's impossible! Part of the problem is that community organisations often write job descriptions which they know are ridiculous, in order to get funding, leaving the worker with little feeling of achievement.
4. Prioritise! Work out what the most important things are and concentrate on those. Divide your tasks at work into A's, B's and C's for example. See page 9
5. Do the A's first. Then the B's, and realise that if you don't ever get to the C's it doesn't really matter. There are many unimportant activities which we waste valuable time on. Probably no one would notice if we never did them. For example, do you really need to spend an hour getting that letter just right?
6. Don't delay the A's. do them when you have the most energy (usually first thing in the day). Don't do the easy things first – reading correspondence doesn't take much energy and should be left for lower energy times.
7. Concentrate on the long term goals and keep your mind on them.
8. Learn to say no. If you are pressed for time you will need to make some hard decisions about how you spend it. Learning the right way to say no is better than promising something that you can't deliver. Remember that time management is also about preserving yourself – you are of more value to an organisation if you are in good shape – not feeling tired, bitter or disgruntled.
9. Keep an organised office. No, a messy desk is not the sign of a creative individual! All those files and papers that you leave on your desk to remind you of tasks will only end up distracting you from the task at hand. Your diary and your To Do list should remind you of all the tasks for the day.
10. Plan and prioritise regularly. Daily planning isn't enough, it is too easy to lose sight of the bigger picture and get bogged down in smaller unimportant tasks. Plan your next day before you leave work at the end of the day. Monthly and yearly planning is also a great idea.

Top 10 time wasters

1. No priorities

If you are going to be effective in making real change in your organisation and in your community then you need to have a plan and stick to it.

Prioritise your work each day (A guide for this is outlined is on page 9) and start your morning with your hardest task.

2. Procrastination

It is a fallacy that people work better under pressure – recall the dangers of procrastination, and learn instead the relief that comes from getting the number one priority out of the way early in the day.

Focus on starting the task, it can help to break the project up into smaller pieces and you will feel a sense of relief for each part you finish. Give yourself deadlines and reward yourself when you have completed the task.

3. Inability to say no

It is natural to want to help people, but you must be able to say no, including to supervisors and management (explain to management your current workload and ask them what task should be dropped before adding another). Practice the polite but firm no.

If you are always willing to take on additional tasks you will find that you are always asked to take on more and more and more.

4. Unwillingness to delegate

You cannot do everything.

There are good reasons to delegate including the fact that delegation helps staff to build their skills and confidence and gives them more opportunities for further development.

When delegating consider the skills and interest of your staff and areas where they would like to grow. Once you have taken the time to clearly explain the task and what is required, give space for staff to develop a project in their own way.

You may be tempted to take over if a project is not going as you had planned. If staff encounter a problem with the project ask them how they are going to overcome the problem, don't do this for them.

Don't just delegate the boring and routine tasks. Try to delegate some new and exciting projects so that staff feel that they are valued and appreciated by the organisation.

5. Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a waste of time, some things simply aren't worth the time or effort. Work out what things really need to be perfect, and what things don't.

6. Not communicating your work priorities

As a manager you must learn to prioritise, and let others know what your priorities are. People will not value your time if they don't know that you have already planned your day.

Stick your weekly planner on the staff notice board so your staff will know where you are and what you are working on while you are in the office.

A common scenario facing managers is that some staff may expect you to be available at any time. When the manager leaves for a meeting, some staff may panic and suddenly remember that they need to talk to you about an issue.

Example - your staff member Joe has been working on a funding submission for 4 weeks. On the day the submission is due he tells you about it and says that you need to approve it right away. You end up staying back late at work to finish reading and approving the submission.

You can prevent such scenarios from happening by following these steps –

- Always let staff know about your plans for the week – your meetings and the tasks you are working on at the office
- During supervision ask staff what they will be working on in the next month that they will need feedback on. Explain that this needs to be scheduled in your diary. They can then be sure that you will give the project your full attention and support.

This strategy really does work and it helps staff to better plan their own timeframes and respect yours.

If you are frequently faced with interruptions you may need to rethink your approach to supervision to include more discussion and briefings on tasks.

7. Gatecrashers

Gatecrashers are uninvited visitors who do not have a legitimate reason to be there. Gatecrashers want someone to gossip, complain or get needless advice from. Often they are busy procrastinating their own work and are looking for any distraction.

If it is not an urgent issue say “I'm sorry but I'm trying to finish this report but I can set time aside later or at supervision if it's really important”. or “I am on my way to a meeting, is it so urgent that it can't wait another hour? I am happy to sit down with you when I get back”. Make a meeting time where you can give the staff member your full attention and support.

Other strategies you can use to remove unwelcome disruptions

- Remove visitors chairs or place some papers on your chairs - people will not stay as long if they have to stand.
- If you are really busy consider closing your office door for one hour each day.

8. Phone calls and emails

If the phone rings constantly, how about establishing a quiet hour where you and everyone else can get some serious work done. An answering machine (which states your reception hours) is a must.

When making telephone calls, do them all at once, and perhaps have something mindless to do (stuffing envelopes etc) if the call does not require too much brain power. Make sure you are properly prepared when making important telephone calls, with paperwork and so on.

Turn your email indicator off and only check every few hours. (most emails CAN wait a few hours).

Remove your name from any unnecessary email lists.

9. Unnecessary meetings

You do not have to attend every meeting you are invited to.

Before you say yes to a meeting think about how much a meeting will really achieve and whether a phone call or email will suffice.

When you are facilitating meetings remember – good meetings have a clear goal, start on time, end on time, have an agenda, have an effective chairperson, have a designated person for each action item, use strategies to make them less boring and more participatory.

Schedule your meetings together, or at your own workplace to save on travel time.

10. Attempting too much

Learn to estimate your time better and always add at least 20% to your estimate for unexpected surprises.

Useful tools for time management

Priorities for my work today

	Not urgent	Very Urgent
Not important	Not as important and not urgent <i>Priority C</i>	Very urgent but not as important <i>Priority B</i>
Very Important	Very important but not as urgent <i>Priority B</i>	Very Urgent and Very Important <i>Priority A</i>

Do A's first
Do B's second
Do C's last, if at all.

Priorities for our organization / team

	Low impact	High impact
High workload	High workload with low impact <i>Priority C</i>	High workload with high impact <i>Priority B</i>
Low workload	Low workload with low impact <i>Priority B</i>	High impact with low workload <i>Priority A</i>

Do A's first
Do B's second
Do C's last, if at all.

My action plan!

Here are 3 steps I will take to improve my time management

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

