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Stop procrastinating! Tips for successful time management

It is sometimes difficult to fit work and play into a busy schedule. Here are some tips on how to make sure work does not take over

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According to the latest “Living to work” survey report,¹ the proportion of people working more than 48 hours a week, has increased from one in 10 to one in four over the past five years. The report from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) also shows that the average working week for women has increased by three-and-a-half hours. Contrary to popular belief, technology has not yet brought us into the promised leisure society. We seem to be spending more time at work than ever and Parkinson’s Law still rules — work expands to fill the time available. And it does. Unless it is controlled, work or study will keep expanding to fill the time that is available.

Start now

Being able to manage your time effectively is an important life skill that you need to develop as a student. Good time management is not so much about managing your time as it is about managing your life so that you can spend

your time on things that matter. Successful time management starts with being aware of your key goals in life and being able to distinguish between things that are urgent and things that are important. Urgent situations require speedy and immediate action but are not necessarily important. For example, if you spill black ink all over your white overall, the situation is urgent and requires immediate action. However, it is nowhere near as important as passing your finals. Tasks or activities that can be defined as important matter greatly although they do not often require immediate action.

Be clear about your roles

Time management is much more effective if you are clear about your different roles in life. For example, in addition to being a student or preregistration trainee you may also be somebody’s girlfriend or boyfriend, somebody’s son or daughter, you might be a member of a sports club, a volunteer charity worker and so on. Being able to attach relative importance to the different

everything you need to do. The solution to this dilemma is to delegate and you can develop the skill now before you start work. For example, ask librarians (nicely) to locate resources for you. Alternatively, rather than waste time trying to find some elusive resource, ask a lecturer to help. Friends or relatives may offer to do some shopping for you while you are busy revising. Let them. Learn to let go of responsibilities and tasks that can be carried out competently by others and do not be embarrassed to accept help.

Defeating common time wasters

People It is inevitable that people will make unnecessary demands on your time. You need therefore to teach them to respect your time. This means that sometimes you have to be assertive and say “no”. It might also mean that you have to be a little more strategic about how you use your time. For example, rather than have your friends visit you all the time and perhaps overstay their welcome, visit them and stay in control of your time. You might also find it useful to make people aware that your time is not some bottomless pit, but has limits.

Waiting Whether it is a bus queue, a GP surgery or commuter traffic, waiting is the one frustrating common denominator. However, it need not be a complete waste of time. Waiting time can be turned into productive time if you have a contingency plan for those times when waiting around might be a possibility. For example, if you have an appointment at the doctor’s or have to bring your car to a garage for repairs, make sure you carry revision notes with you or writing paper to sketch out ideas for an assignment. Alternatively, always carry a book with you wherever you go.

Procrastination Sometimes called the biggest thief of time, most of us are afflicted with procrastination. Students, particularly, have a reputation for leaving assignments until the last minute and then going into panic as the deadline looms. Behaviour analysts have concluded that we procrastinate for various reasons. Often it is simply because we do not want to deal with the unpleasant, such as the 5,000-word essay that has been hanging around for

weeks. In some cases we procrastinate for other more complex reasons such as feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem or fear of failure.

You can break the chain of procrastination by doing the following:

- ▶ Divide complex tasks into small parts
- ▶ Set up a timescale and deadlines for achieving each part of a task
- ▶ Deal with unpleasant tasks first so that they are out of the way
- ▶ Action plan and prioritise your activities and tasks on a weekly basis

Television It is easily done. You switch the television on to watch your favourite programme and before you know it, your entire evening has been consumed by television because it is far easier to watch it by default than out of choice. To avoid total immersion in television, at the beginning of the week, make a schedule of the programmes that you want to watch and stick to it.

Time is far too precious to waste, think of time as a commodity and spend it wisely. χ

References

1. *Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Living to work? Survey report. London: The Institute; 2003*

Further Reading

- ▶ *Covey SR. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. London: Simon & Schuster; 1999.*
- ▶ *Drew S, Bingham R. The Student Skills Guide (2nd edition). Hampshire: Gower; 2001.*
- ▶ *Fleming I. The Time Management Pocketbook (4th edition). Hampshire: Management Pocketbooks; 2001.*
- ▶ *Haynes M. Make Every Minute Count (3rd edition). London: Kogan Page; 2000.*

activities associated with your range of roles will help you make the best use of your time. For example, if the most important thing in your life right now is passing your exams, then revision as opposed to playing in sports tournaments every week should be your priority.

In his book ‘The 7 habits of highly effective people’, Stephen Covey suggests that the best way to live and work is by concentrating your time and energies on the important rather than the urgent activities attached to each of your roles. Adopting this approach to time management rather than a “to do” list approach, helps you to shape your priorities on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. It does not mean that you will never have urgent matters to deal with, but that your focus will be on important activities.

Delegate

When you eventually start to work full-time at a professional level, you will find that even after you have established all your priorities, you still cannot do