

## 15. How do I handle my day-to-day tasks along with managing a project?

### Depends on:

- ▲ Whether you have a small or a significant number of other responsibilities

### Determining Your Available Time

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There are two aspects to this issue—the short term and the long term. In the short term, keeping up with your responsibilities starts with preserving at least a little slack time in your schedule. To ensure this, review your daily schedules at least a day or two out and protect a small amount of open time in both the morning and the afternoon for dealing with unanticipated needs. At the end of a day of back-to-back meetings, you will undoubtedly have a number of pending tasks, some of which will be late. Also, always check your schedule to preserve a bit of slack before accepting new meeting requests or other new commitments (or when planning new meetings yourself). When you must, say “no” to requests you cannot meet.

Longer term, balancing your responsibilities with your available time begins with a realistic assessment of your capacity. When your overall responsibilities exceed what you can reasonably get done, you will ultimately need to either delegate or eliminate some of your work.

For most project managers, the number of hours available in a week tends to be flexible, but it is finite. Exactly how you choose to estimate your capacity is up to you, but it is a good idea to begin with a maximum based on a combination of what you generally have done in the past, your personal preferences, and organizational expectations. Having determined your theoretical capacity, you should deduct about 10 percent or so to account for unexpected emergencies and personal time off for vacations and other time away from work. The remaining portion of your time is what is realistically available for formal commitments and responsibilities. (If you determine that fifty hours is your reasonable workload, you will need to reserve an average of an uncommitted hour per day in a five-day week.)

## Assessing Your Project Management Responsibilities

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Next, assess the amount of time your project management responsibilities require. As a general guideline, each contributor you regularly interact with will require about 10 percent of your time. In addition, you may have other related management responsibilities, such as filling out reports, assessing and reporting on job performance, managing outsourcing relationships, participating in project-related meetings, and routinely communicating with others outside of your team. When your overall project management responsibilities exceed 80 percent of your available time, you will probably have considerable difficulty keeping up with other responsibilities.

## Prioritizing Your Other Responsibilities

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List all your nonproject responsibilities, such as ongoing support and production activities, participation in task forces and organizational committees, and management requests. Rank order your list using assessment criteria such as:

- ▲ Value to the organization
- ▲ Time sensitivity and urgency
- ▲ Value to you personally when successfully completed
- ▲ Consequences to you personally when not successfully completed

It can be useful to determine both importance and urgency for these items. Just because a request is urgent does not always mean that it should be a high priority.

## Balancing Your Responsibilities

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Insert your project (or projects) into the sorted list just above any of your current responsibilities that are less important. Assess the time and effort requirements for all of your responsibilities that are listed above your project work (if there are any). If the aggregate workload represented by project work and your high-priority responsibilities exceeds your available capacity, you will need to delegate (or get others to delegate) enough of it to make accomplishment realistic.

If the difference is small, you may be able to deal with it yourself by

delegating work for some of your key responsibilities or project activities. When delegating work, always seek willing owners, and for any responsibility where you remain ultimately accountable, remember that some effort will remain yours.

If the difference is large, you will probably have to escalate matters. You may be able to get your management to reassign some of your high-priority nonproject assignments to others. If this is impossible (or undesirable), you still may be able to get relief by securing help in doing the required work. If, despite your best efforts, you are unable to reduce the workload from your nonproject responsibilities, then you may need to offload some project work, modify the project baseline, or otherwise adjust the amount of time required to stay in control of your project. Part-time project management is rarely successful, however, so you should anticipate continuing difficulties if you are unable to realistically allocate a substantial majority of your time to project management activities.

After balancing your project and other highest-priority responsibilities against your capacity, you might have some residual lower-priority work at the bottom of your rank-ordered list. If so, you will need to delegate the work or get it reassigned to someone else. In cases where the work is truly unimportant, you may even get away with communicating your intention not to do it, and simply ignore it.

## Reassessing Your Workload

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The problem of creeping workload is perpetual. Shortly after you have successfully balanced your responsibilities and given yourself a reasonable chance of keeping up with your work, you are likely to find yourself again overwhelmed. Maintaining some slack in your short-range daily schedules will help, as will judiciously saying “no” to at least some requests that come your way.

It’s also a good practice to reassess your workload against your capacity about once each quarter. Work with your team and management to delegate and reassign work to ensure that important commitments remain realistic. No one benefits when dates are missed, stress levels are excessive, mistakes are frequent, and people become burned out.