

# 1 1/2 Time and Life Management

**No matter how much time I spend on my schoolwork, I can't seem to catch up. What can I do?**

**What is the best system to help me get organized so I can get the most important things done?**

**How can I find time to have some fun? All I do is work and study.**

**I'm a "go-with-the-flow" type person. A daily "to-do" list seems too rigid for me. Are other options available for managing time that fit my personality better?**

**I am a major procrastinator! Can you help me?**

## REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES

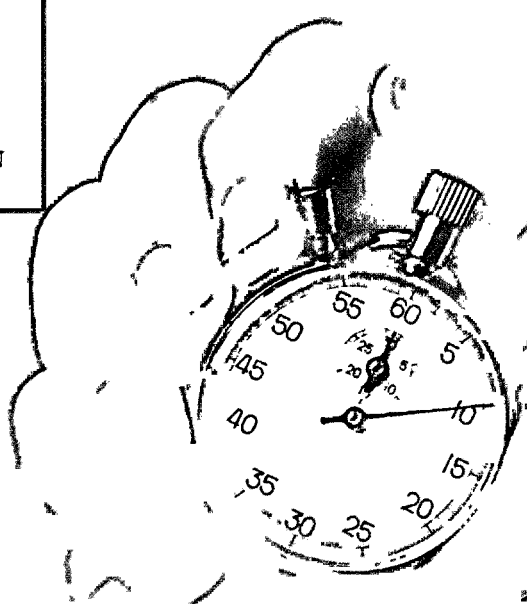
**Students Share Their Experience** "In planning out my day and arranging things in order of priority, I found that I was getting a lot more of the important things done and being controlled less by things that seemed urgent. I was more prepared when it came time to put out fires, and because my priorities were written down, I delegated many of the urgent things to others. My stress levels were much lower because I had a better idea of the things I wanted to get done. I seemed to accomplish a lot more in less time. I had more peaceful relaxation time because my other concerns were written and scheduled. Before, I normally laid in bed thinking about all the things I had to do the next day, but by making a list beforehand, I actually slept better and my day flowed better. When my life is organized, my comfort level rises. I'm happier and less of a grouch. I'm a better student, a better husband, and a better father. When I'm organized, I tend to get off track less and don't get upset over the small stuff."

—Jeff S.

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Dost thou love life, then do not squander time, for that is the stuff that life is made of.

—BEN FRANKLIN



"I'm a very organized person. I like to have things laid out so I can prioritize and plan. Prioritizing my time was a perfect assignment for that! It especially helped me keep my homework done. Being able to assign an A, B, or C helped me not to be so stressed about getting everything done at once, too! In respect to my time, I thought I efficiently used the little time I had. I always feel better when I get

something done, and this was a no-fail way of being productive. I had my own version of time management, but after reading this chapter and practicing these ideas daily, I was able to lay things out better and become more familiar with prioritizing. I was able to use my time in a good way, and I still had some time left over to do something fun!"

—Karen M.

## Student Objectives

Study of this chapter will enable you to:

1. Select a time management technique that will work for you.
2. Identify time wasters.
3. Prioritize to gain control of your time.
4. Overcome procrastination.
5. Reduce your stress by being more efficient and effective.

# Time and Life Management

Time management is like a diet. We hope for the magic pill that will make our time management struggles magically disappear. But time management is about taking action. The perception that we don't have enough time is one of life's great stressors. Yet we all have exactly 60 minutes in every hour, 24 hours in every day, and 168 hours in every week. No one gets more, and no one gets less. So time management is really about managing our self and our life to do and have the things that are most important to us.

In this chapter you will learn some tools and techniques to reduce your stress by gaining control over how you use your time. First we will explain three time management techniques. Then we will offer some tips on how to overcome procrastination and eliminate time wasters, which will put you on the path to finding balance in your daily life.

## What Is Time Management?

We live our lives within the context of time. Time is the medium through which we live our lives. Development, maturation, learning, wisdom, and serenity are critically related to the passage of time. Time is an omnipresent factor in our lives.<sup>1</sup> How we choose to spend our time determines the level of satisfaction we experience.

**Time** is nothing more than the occurrence of events in sequence, one after another. Getting out of bed is an event; walking to answer the phone, getting into the car, and everything else we do in a day are events. Time is the occurrence of all of the events of our lives, one after another. Albert Einstein once said that time is what keeps one thing after another from all happening at the same time. **Management** is the art or manner of controlling. A working definition of **time management**, therefore, is the art or manner of controlling the sequence of events in our lives.

We live in deeds,  
not years;  
In thoughts, not breaths;  
In feelings, not in figures  
on a dial.  
We should count time  
by heart throbs.

—ARISTOTLE

## Time and Stress

Psychologists tell us that our stress levels are directly related to how much control we feel over events and situations in our life. To the extent that we feel like we have less control, we correspondingly experience more stress. Emotions associated with feeling out of control include

## Time Pressure and Stress

Findings from a study conducted to examine the relationship between the use of time; subjectively perceived time pressure, life stress, mental health, and life satisfaction, are as follows:

- The subjective sense of time pressure is grounded in objective reality. Those reporting higher levels of perceived time pressure carry heavier loads of paid and unpaid work and are limited in their access to leisure-time resources.
- Both low and excessive time pressures seem to correlate negatively with mental health.
- Life-cycle situations strongly affect respondents' sense of life satisfaction and emotional well-being. Employed married

respondents in the 25–44 age group, and particularly the 45–64 age group, with or without children at home, reported the highest levels of emotional well-being, even though some of these groups are pressed for time.

- Unemployed people, students, and divorcees reported the lowest levels of life satisfaction.

Notice that both low and high time pressures can have a negative impact on mental health. People with a perceived sense of control over their time and their life reported less stress. This helps explain why the unemployed, students, and divorcees reported less satisfaction and control and greater stress.

**Source:** "Time Use, Time Pressure, Personal Stress, Mental Health, and Life Satisfaction from a Life Cycle Perspective," by J. Zuzanek, *Journal of Occupational Science*, 5 (1998): 26–39.

distress and anxiety. When we feel in control of something, we typically experience the emotions of calmness, security, and inner peace. Time is one of those areas in life in which we often feel like we have lost control. Gaining some control over how we use our time is crucial to managing stress. Research has shown that time management has a positive impact on employees' mental health, and that this may be attributable primarily to enhanced feelings of control over time.<sup>2</sup>

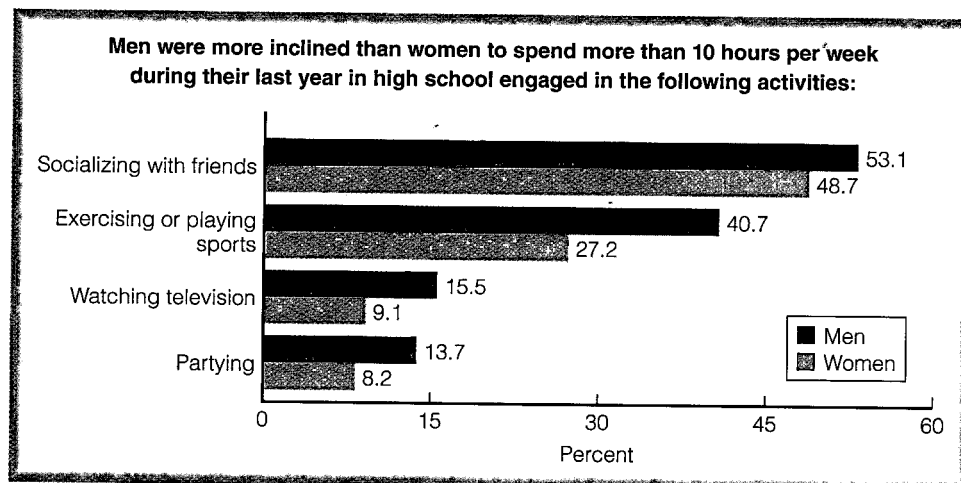
Women and men rate themselves differently in terms of time management and stress levels. In a national study of college students, women were more likely to rate their time management skills as "above average," but they also were twice as likely as men to indicate that they felt frequently overwhelmed by all they had to do. According to Linda Sax, UCLA associate professor of education and director of the survey, women's greater tendency to feel overwhelmed may reflect the differences in how women and men spend their time. Perhaps as a function of their comparatively higher levels of involvement in potentially stress-buffering activities, men were more likely than women to perceive lower levels of stress and to rate their emotional health as above average. Men also were less likely than women to report that they felt frequently or occasionally depressed over the past year.<sup>3</sup> Based on this national survey of college freshmen, Figure 11.1 summarizes how men and women spend their time.

What about children? Are today's kids too busy? It seems the stress related to a perceived lack of time starts early. Adults might think that kids' lives are carefree and full of free time. However, a recent KidsHealth KidsPoll<sup>4</sup> shows that kids have quite a different opinion. Of the 882 kids ages 9 to 13 who were polled, 41% reported feeling stressed most of the time or always because they have too much to do. Most agreed on one thing: 77% wish they had more free time.

Adults and children, college students and employees, women and men; many share the common perception that they are too busy. We feel stressed because we believe we have too much to do and not enough time to do it. So, how can we take control of our time to reduce our stress? Deliberate planning and time management techniques are the answer.

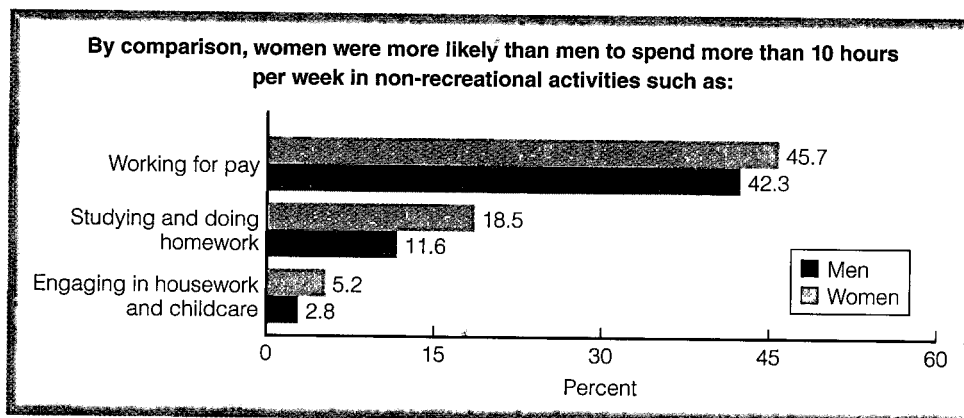


*Today's kids feel rushed and stressed. They want more free time just to be kids.*



**FIGURE 11.1** How Men and Women Spend Their Time

Source: <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu>



## Planning for Control

Planning will help you get control of your time and your life. **Planning** is the act of bringing future events into the present so appropriate control can be applied. Once you master the skill of planning, it will free you from the underlying feeling that your life is out of control.

Why do we sometimes avoid planning? Maybe we think that planning inhibits our creativity, keeps us from going with the flow, takes too much time, or doesn't allow for interruptions and is restricting. Or maybe we have no idea how to plan in a way that makes any sense, or maybe we lack the discipline to develop and follow a plan.

**Pareto's Law** A principle that can help you in planning was developed by Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist and political sociologist who lived from 1848 to 1923. He devised the law of the "trivial many and the critical few," better known as **Pareto's law**, or the 80:20 rule. This rule says that, in many activities, 80% of the potential value can be achieved from just 20% of the effort, and that one can spend the remaining 80% of effort for relatively little return. Even though Pareto lived a century ago, his 80:20 rule, in its many forms, is accepted as almost universal truth.

The reverse is also true: Things that take up 80% of your time and resources will produce only 20% of your results. Let's say your term paper is due tomorrow, so the pressure is on. You plan to complete the assignment in three hours, and tonight is the night. You gather your assignment instructions and related materials, tell your friends to leave you alone, and turn on your computer. You hear the message, "You have mail," so you decide to check your messages. Half an hour later, you have replied to your messages and are determined to focus on your paper. You connect to the online library resources and start with a search of key words. You scroll through some abstracts that might relate to your paper. You come

I get up every morning determined to both change the world and to have one hell of a good time. Sometimes, this makes planning the day difficult.

—E. B. WHITE (20TH CENTURY AMERICAN WRITER)

Time is a theoretical construct laden with cultural value judgments. Anthropologist E. T. Hall identified societies as either being based on **monochronic time** (M-time), such as Northern and Western European, European American, and “westernized” cultures, or being based on **polychronic time** (P-time), such as Middle Eastern, Latin American, and Native American cultures.

M-time societies view time as linear with the preference being to do one thing at a time. People in M-time cultures tend to view time as a commodity, to be saved/lost, spent/wasted, or squandered/managed. P-time cultures tend to be

cyclical and unscheduled, typically viewing time as a natural rhythm in which several things can happen at once and not controlled by human beings.

Exploring our own personal and cultural biases about time is important. Understanding the relationship between time and ethnicity, gender and age, can increase our sensitivity to different perspectives while at the same time increasing our awareness of factors that affect our perspective.

**Source:** “The Concept of Time: Its Cultural and Functional Implications,” by A. MacRae, *American Occupational Therapy Association: Conference, Abstracts and Resources* (Bethesda, MD: Author, 1995).

## FYI

### Maybe Others, But Surely Not Me

75%—Percentage of time that is taken up by socializing, recreation, and sleeping during American students' first two years of college; only 7% is used for studying.

**Source:** *Time*, 177(4), January 31, 2011: 15.

across a link to an interesting Web site, which leads to another, and then another, and an hour later, you still have not written one word of your paper. You get the idea. Concentrating your efforts on the key activities that get results will increase your efficiency and decrease your stress.

The universality of Pareto's law can be a powerful guide for you in planning how you spend your time. You have the power to set the vital priorities that will mean the difference between failure, survival, and success. Think about how this applies to you. This chapter will help you determine the activities that will yield the most benefits as you work to achieve what you value.

**Methods of Time Management** Of the many useful planning and time management methods, most begin by asking these four crucial questions:

1. What are my highest priorities? (What is most important to me?)
2. Of my priorities, which do I value the most?
3. What can I do about my highest priorities in the days and weeks to come?
4. When, during today or this week, will I do these things?

This chapter introduces you to three effective methods to help you answer these questions so you can take control of the events in your life.

1. ABC123 Prioritized Planning
2. Quadrant Planning
3. Lifebalance

Because we are all different, no time management system works equally well for everyone. As you will observe, these three methods have similarities and differences. In reading them, you may find yourself attracted to one method more than the others. You also might find ways to modify the methods according to your own circumstances and preferences. Each has been found to be effective in helping people gain control over their lives and, as a result, significantly reduce their stress.

## ABC123 Prioritized Planning

A simple, yet powerful method of managing the events of our lives involves moving beyond the traditional “to-do” list. Called the **ABC123 Prioritized Planning** method, it was introduced by Alan Lakein.<sup>5</sup> The focus of this method is to move from crisis management and putting out fires toward doing those things that are most important to us.

First, dedicate 15 minutes each day to thoughtful planning. This could be either at the beginning of the day or the evening prior to the next day. During the 15-minute daily planning follow this three-phase procedure:

**Phase I: Make a List** Make a list of everything you want to accomplish today. At this point, don't assign any value to anything on the list. Simply unload onto a piece of paper or a

planner the things you want to and need to do today. At this point, it looks much like a traditional "to-do" list. This may be a long list. That is okay.

## Phase II: Give a Value to Each Item on the List, Using ABC

Put an "A" next to each item on your list that *must* be done today. These are the vital things that are most important to you. "Important" is not the same as "urgent," and you must clarify the difference. Urgent items shout for immediate action. Many times these urgent things are not necessarily important but they have the appearance of having to be handled *right now*. Answering a telephone or checking an e-mail may seem urgent but often lacks relative importance.

Examples of "A" priority items might include studying for a test that will take place in two or three days, putting some gas in the car if you're running on empty, going to the gym to work out, taking your daughter to a movie, spending some quiet time meditating, or beginning research for a paper that is due in three weeks. These are all important items, though they may not be hollering at you to be done "right now." These important but not necessarily urgent items *must* get on your list as "A" items.

Next, place a "B" beside each item that should be done today. These are items with *some importance* to you. An example of a "B" item might be deciding on a topic for a paper that is due in six weeks, filling your car with gas when it still has a quarter of a tank left, or changing the water in the fish tank.

The items on your list that will get a "C" are the tasks that have *very little importance* to you. These items could be done but won't suffer at all if they are not. Examples of "C" items might be washing your car, going to a store to buy a shirt, reading the newspaper, or cleaning out the garage.

Mark shared in class that he realized he had let a "C" item replace an "A" item the day before. He said, "My three-year-old daughter, Annie, asked me to read her a bedtime story last night. I promised I would as soon as I finished reading the newspaper. When I finished the paper and went into Annie's room, I found her sound asleep. I felt a lump in my throat when I realized I had let something as unimportant as reading the paper come before spending some time with Annie at the end of the day."

The value you give items will change as the events in your life change. What was once a "C" item, such as cleaning the garage, might soon become a "B" item if you no longer can get your car into the garage. The level of importance of working on a research paper changes as the due date for the paper approaches. The key point is that you are the one who is evaluating the relative importance of each of the items on your list based on how you currently perceive them.

*Remember, spending your time on what is truly important can contribute to joy and happiness.*

## FYI

### Tyranny of the Urgent

We have a tendency to do the urgent things at the expense of the highly important things. For example, most people would agree that spending time developing a relationship is important. Spending quality time with a friend or a family member is vital to the relationship. Yet, the amount of time that parents spend talking to each other or their children is small in relation to the time they spend doing seemingly more urgent but far less important items of the day such as watching a favorite TV program or surfing the Internet. Charles Hummel, president of Barrington University, had this to say about the difference between the urgent and the important task:

The important or vital task rarely must be done today or even this week. The urgent task calls for instant action. The momentary appeal of these tasks seems irresistible and they devour our energy. But in the light of time's perspective, their deceptive prominence fades. With a sense of loss, we recall the vital task we have pushed aside; we realize we have become slaves to the tyranny of the urgent.<sup>6</sup>



© Bill Robinson/Getty Images

**Phase III: Prioritize Again, Using 123** In Phase III of the planning process, give a numerical value to each item on the list based on its relative importance to you. First, move through the "A" items and compare each one. Ask yourself which of these very important items is *the most important of all*. That item gets a "1" next to the "A" so it becomes "A1" on your list. Proceed through each of the As until you have given a ranking to each. Then proceed to the Bs, and then the Cs.

Table 11.1 is an example of how your planning list might appear after following through on each of the three phases. The action plan for the day would begin with the item that received the A1, followed by A2, and on through the A items. When the A items are completed, you proceed to B1, B2, and so on.

What you have just done is determine the order in which you will do the things you want to do based on their relative value to you. You are determining the sequence of the events of your day. You have begun to gain control of your day, because you have put your most important things first.

A word of warning if you want to make this work effectively: The human tendency is to skip the most valuable and important things (the "A" items on the list) and move to the items that are easier, more fun, or less demanding (the "B" and "C" items on the list). Doing this will have consequences. First, and most notably, many of your important items will turn into urgent items. If you put off working on the research paper until a couple days before it is due, you are in panic mode. The quality of your paper probably will suffer and you are less likely to enjoy working on your paper. This is called "putting out the fires." It is the urgency mode. Stress levels definitely increase when we operate in this mode.

The other consequence of doing the "B" and "C" items first and putting off the "A" items is inner chaos. As we discussed in Chapter 9, on values, when we do the things that are most important to us, we experience inner peace because what we do and what we value are aligned. When we don't do the things that are aligned with what we value, we lose our inner peace.

On most days you won't finish everything on your list. In fact, you rarely will. Classes, meetings, work obligations, and interruptions will interfere with your plan. The real value of the ABC123 system becomes clear when we do have periods of free time when we can choose among several activities. During those times in the day, we can go to the top of our list, our A1 item, and work from there.

This method of planning can be an effective way to get some control over the events of life, especially if you currently aren't doing anything to plan your days and frequently feel overwhelmed. By using the ABC123 method, you can gain back some of that control.

*Tip:* A simple adaptation of the ABC123 method is to start each day by making a list of the six most important things you want to accomplish that day. With careful thought, this one simple action can help relieve your stress and free your mind to focus on what is most important to you.

**TABLE 11.1** Example of Prioritized Daily Planning

ABC	Task List
B4	Schedule appointment for a haircut
A5	Get snacks for tonight's party
A3	Go to the gym to work out
C3	Check e-mail
B3	Send thank-you letter for last week's job interview
C4	Go to the mall to look for new jeans
C5	Play Nintendo with Eric
A2	Go to eye doctor appointment
A4	Meditate for 15 minutes
A1	Study for tomorrow's math test
B2	Study for next week's history test
C2	Make appointment with a counselor to decide on a major at school
B1	Call players on intramural team about next week's game
C1	Write a letter to parents

## The Time of Your Life

A study was conducted to examine time-use patterns and related variables, including feelings about time use, time management, and academic achievement by college students. In the study, 106 male and female students completed self-report questionnaires to measure their use of time (activities they engaged in during a typical 24-hour period) and feelings about their use of time (related to competence, value, enjoyment) for the activities they reported.

They also completed a Time Management Questionnaire that measured their attitudes, preferences for short-range

planning, and preferences for long-range planning. Results of the study suggest that older students and those experiencing role overloads perceive themselves as less competent, and they value and enjoy their use of time less than younger students and those with fewer role demands. In addition, the use of time management was related to academic achievement.

**Source:** "Time Use, Time Management and Academic Achievement Among Occupational Therapy Students," by A. Henry, C. Costa, D. Ladd, C. Robertson, J. Rollins, and L. Roy, *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment and Rehabilitation*, 6 (1996): 115-126.

## Quadrant Planning

The second method of time and life management, **Quadrant Planning**, is one of the most popular time management systems today. This method was developed by Stephen Covey and is explained in his bestselling book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.<sup>7</sup> Quadrant Planning relates to the habit of highly successful people called "First Things First."

**First Things First** Quadrant Planning begins with a long-term approach to time management by inviting you to answer some questions. The answers to these questions will guide you in your daily decisions. Covey believes that traditional time management methods don't bring peace and fulfillment because we don't put the most important things (first things) first. He compels us to assess what our first things are with some thoughtful questions:

- Are the things that are less important in your life receiving the most attention?
- Are too many good things getting in the way of your best?
- Are you making the tough decision to choose the best over the good?
- What activities, if you knew you did superbly and consistently, would have a significant positive impact on your life?
- How many people, on their deathbed, wish they had spent more time at the office?

We should ask ourselves first, "Am I doing the right things?" After we have answered this question, we can ask, "Am I doing things right?" When we do this, we begin to put our lives in a direction that is much more fulfilling and effective.

**Urgency versus Importance** The key to doing first things first is to distinguish again between the urgent and the important. We may be busy working as hard as we can only to find that at the end of the day, we feel unfulfilled. This is because we put the **urgent**, those things demanding our attention in the moment, before the **important**, the things that would make a difference in the long-term. Urgency seems to control our lives. The only way to truly master our time is to organize our schedule each day to spend most of our time doing things that are important but not necessarily urgent.

In the Activity Matrix, Figure 11.2, Quadrant 1 activities will demand our attention at times, but the point to remember is that if urgency is what is driving you, you may be missing the important things. Quadrant 2 activities, the important activities, should be our first things—the things on which we focus most of our time and energy.

Imagine a big jar sitting on a table, and next to the jar is a pile of rocks of varying sizes, including a few cups of sand that signify the smallest rocks. We want to put all the rocks in the jar. If we put the sand in first and then proceed to try to put the bigger rocks in after the sand



Figure 11.2 Activity Matrix

<b>Quadrant 1: Urgent and Important</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crises</li> <li>• Pressing problems</li> <li>• Deadline-driven projects</li> <li>• Urgent meetings</li> <li>• Important things on which we have procrastinated</li> </ul>	<b>Quadrant 2: Important, Not Urgent</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation</li> <li>• Prevention</li> <li>• Values clarification</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Relationship building</li> <li>• True recreation</li> <li>• Empowerment</li> </ul>
<b>Quadrant 3: Urgent, But Not Important</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interruptions, some phone calls</li> <li>• Some mail, some reports</li> <li>• Some meetings</li> <li>• Many proximate, pressing matters</li> <li>• Many popular activities</li> </ul>	<b>Quadrant 4: Not Urgent, Not Important</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trivia</li> <li>• Busywork</li> <li>• Some phone calls</li> <li>• Time wasters</li> <li>• "Escape" activities</li> </ul>

has filled the jar, we will not have room for the big rocks. But if we put the big rocks into the jar first, we then can add the smaller rocks and even the sand.

Think of Quadrant 2 activities as the big rocks. If we don't plan those things first (putting first things first), they will not make it into our daily activities because we become so busy doing the less important, but often urgent things. When we plan the Quadrant 2 activities into our weeks and days, we find ourselves doing the most important things first. As a result, we enjoy inner peace, our self-esteem goes up, and we find ourselves being more productive.

**Quadrant Planning in Action** To put the principles of Quadrant Planning into a time management action plan, follow these steps:

**Step 1: Quadrant 2 Questions** In our planning time, rather than starting by listing all of the "things to do," Covey suggests that we should *first* ask ourselves the more important questions. As we do this, we find ourselves doing more things that are in Quadrant 2 and, as a result, we live according to those most important things.

- What do I want to be, do, and contribute in my life?
- What three or four things are most important to me?
- What are my long-range goals?
- Which relationships are most important to me?
- What are my main responsibilities?
- What contributions would I like to make?
- What principles do I value?
- What feelings do I want to experience in life?
- How would I spend the coming week if I were to have only six months to live?

When we are thinking about the days and weeks ahead and what we will spend our time doing, we first answer these questions. The answers will guide our choices.

**Step 2: Identify Roles** To increase our feelings of order and balance and to help answer Quadrant 2 questions, we focus on our roles in life. Much pain can come from realizing that we are succeeding in one role at the expense of another. Too often we hear of people who are successful in their business life but encounter problems with their family life or their spiritual life. A holistic view of life involves a balance between the various dimensions of life, including the physical, social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. Our roles help us fulfill the need of these dimensions and give us a sense of wholeness in quality of life. These roles may include family, personal, business, school, relationships, and community. List your roles, and then go back and ask the Quadrant 2 questions for each role.

Select Quadrant 2 goals for each role. Do this by asking the question: What is the most important thing I can do in this role today or this week to have the most positive impact in my life? For example, a mom might decide that the most important thing she can do in her relationship with one of her kids is to spend half an hour each night reading to him before he goes to bed. Perhaps only one goal per week is all that is necessary.

**Step 3: Sharpen the Saw** Covey recommends that we include in our planning a focus he calls sharpening the saw. A man is feverishly sawing away at a tree with his handsaw. A friend walks by and asks the man why he doesn't stop for a while and sharpen his saw so he can cut the tree more easily. The man cutting the tree replies that he can't stop to sharpen the saw because he is too busy sawing. Have you ever felt like you are continually busy, yet you are not accomplishing anything important? Taking time to sharpen your saw can dramatically affect the level of accomplishment you feel in your life. Instead of busily sawing with a dull saw, you are cutting down the trees.

There are things in life that we can do that, if we did them on a regular basis, would help us to sharpen our saw and allow us to do all the other things that we do with greater ease and effectiveness. As we plan, we should consider some of those saw-sharpening activities for each of our dimensions. For example, for the physical dimension, we might focus on activities such as getting regular aerobic exercise or eating a healthier diet. We also might strive to go to bed earlier and awaken earlier to get off to a good start. In the emotional dimension we might decide to meditate regularly. In the social dimension, we could plan to spend quality time with family and friends. In the spiritual dimension, we might read inspiring literature, participate in service-oriented projects, attend religious services, or pray more frequently. These examples have value in themselves, and they also help us do more easily and effectively all the other things we want or need to do.

**Step 4: Evaluate—How Did I Do?** **Integrity** is the ability to carry out a worthy decision after the emotion of making the decision has passed. When we are alone in our planning sessions, we tend to design our days and weeks according to our conscience and according to the things we decide are most important. The real challenge arises when we get to a moment of decision. As we proceed through the day according to our plan, someone invites us to do something that is far less important, though it may be enticing. The challenge is to keep first things first in this moment of choice. Are we going to sacrifice the best for the good in that moment? Or will we remain true to our plan and continue focusing on the best? Goethe said, "Things that matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least."

Part of our movement toward developing ourselves, reducing stress, and reaching our goals involves assessing what we have done to propel us toward each of these goals with integrity. Evaluation is the art of looking back and seeing what we did, how we did it, and if it worked to produce the results we intended. If it did, great! We can add to our pat on the back the question of how we can use that success to continue learning and growing. If we did not see the results we intended, what adjustments can we make to get results in the future?

Here are a few questions for evaluating ourselves as the days and weeks go by:

- What have I learned about myself?
- What goals have I achieved, and what empowered me to accomplish them?
- What goals did I not achieve, and what kept me from accomplishing them?
- What patterns of success or failure do I see in setting and achieving goals?
- Am I setting goals that are realistic but challenging?
- Am I dedicating sufficient time to the three or four things that matter most in my life?
- What challenges did I encounter, and what were my responses?
- Did I take time to keep my saw sharp in the dimensions of my life?

## Author Anecdote

### It's About Time

When I worked as the director of a corporate health promotion program, one of the most common excuses I heard for not exercising was, "I don't have enough time." Yet, I couldn't help but notice that the most productive employees, both at work and home, were those who made time to incorporate exercise into their daily routine. Rather than decreasing their productivity because of the time they spent exercising, their productivity actually increased. This could have been because the time they took to exercise relieved their stress, or increased their endorphins, or helped them think more clearly, or just plain made them feel better about themselves and their job. Whatever the reason, they were sharpening their saw.

—MH

## Author Anecdote

### I Do What I Want To Do

Early one Saturday morning my older brother called and asked if I could come to his home to help him clean his garage later that day. He lives about 60 miles away from me. Thinking that this wouldn't be a pleasant activity, I told him that I couldn't come, that I was too busy. I had too many other things to do.

A couple of weeks later he called again and asked if I wanted to spend that afternoon riding bikes in the mountains near a local ski resort. I had no fewer things to do on that day than I did two weeks earlier, but I told him that I would really like to go—and I did. Thinking about this while driving to his home that Saturday, I realized that I never *have* to do anything. I just as easily could have gone to his house two weeks earlier to help him clean the garage.

—MO

In review, Quadrant Planning for time management includes:

1. Differentiating between what is urgent and what is important
2. Identifying roles in each dimension of life
3. Sharpening the saw
4. Evaluating our performance

You have to decide what your highest priorities are and then have the courage to say “no” to other things. You do this by having a bigger “yes” burning inside and leading your way. The end result is not the feeling that you have deprived yourself but, rather, a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that you have concentrated on what you value.

## Lifebalance

A third method of time management is called **Lifebalance**. Although this approach seems to be significantly different from the previous two approaches, it can be equally as effective in helping you organize your time to relieve stress.

Critics of traditional time management approaches contend that planning is too rigid and tends to dwell too much on doing and having, and not enough on being. These management approaches do not take into consideration our natural rhythms of life. It is as if we can stop to smell the roses only as we are running by them quickly to do something apparently more urgent. In the meantime, we miss life's important unplanned moments. If we have planned every minute of our day and if we do not cross off every planned action from our list, we feel like we have failed. These approaches, critics say, do not seem to allow for spontaneity, freedom, and going with the flow. To some, traditional approaches have an emptiness.

The Lifebalance approach to time and life management promotes a balance of purposeful planning and a healthy mix of going with the flow. In their book, *Lifebalance*,<sup>8</sup> authors Richard and Linda Eyre contend that we live too much of our lives out of balance. Unbalance results from bad habits—habits that emphasize work at the expense of family and personal growth, structure at the expense of spontaneity, or accomplishments at the expense of relationships (or vice versa on any of these). The result of this imbalance is what Thoreau called “lives of quiet desperation.”

The search for a simpler, slower, more flexible, and more meaningful life has vanished in our culture with the constant search for *more*, *better*, and *different*. Contentment has been

## Research HIGHLIGHT

### Time Management Is Stress Management

To help determine if time management really reduces stress, researchers gave an experimental group a time management program focusing on several major components that included prioritizing and goal setting; strategy development; structuring the work day and using implementation; monitoring; and behavior analysis with the identification of stimuli, reactions, and consequences.

The results showed that, compared to a control group that received no training, the group that received the time management training reported a significant difference in perceived stress, in their sense of well-being, and also their perceived control of time. The researchers concluded that “Time management techniques such as prioritizing, structuring the workday, and monitoring increase one's feeling of control, and that increase might lead to less stress.”

**Source:** “Time Management Training and Perceived Control of Time at Work,” by Alexander Häfner and Armin Stock. *Journal of Psychology* 144.5 (2010): 429–447.

replaced by competition. Serenity has been replaced by speed. By contrast, balance implies a healthy combination of all that is important to us and letting our inner nature, rather than our environment and culture, dictate our speed and direction.

Some people are more comfortable with a lifestyle that takes things as they come, and they simply "show up" with whatever seems to unfold in their daily experience. To those who are vigorous planners, this approach seems frivolous and unproductive. How could people accomplish anything if they didn't know where they are going? This follows the adage, "If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail." Again, we are reminded that time management is subjective.

The frustration many people feel with time management planners includes the following:<sup>9</sup>

- Ninety-five percent of what is written in planners has to do with work, career, or finance, which creates an imbalance between work and family and personal needs.
- Planners cause us to live by lists, to act rather than respond. If we're not careful, our lists will control us rather than the other way around. We begin to view things that are not on our lists as irritations or distractions rather than opportunities, and we begin to lose the critical balance between structure and spontaneity.
- Because they are problem- and accomplishment-oriented, most planners direct their attention to things, on getting, and on doing, sometimes at the expense of people and giving and thinking, which results in an imbalance between achievements and relationships.

Here is an example from *Lifebalance*. Consider a typical businessman who uses a schedule book or a time organizer. If we analyze the contents, we will find three things: First, we find that more than 95% percent of his entries (lists, plans, appointments, reminders) have to do with work. It is hard to find anything relating to his family or to his own personal growth. Second, his planning leaves no time for spontaneity or flexibility. He prides himself on using every hour of the day, and he "gets his kicks" from checking off everything on his list. His motto is "Act, don't react." He likes to say that people who are good planners don't like surprises, and he avoids them by allowing only the things on the list. Third, just as he makes no room on his schedule for spontaneity and surprises, he leaves precious little space for relationships. Planning and lists seem to deal much more with things than with people.<sup>10</sup>

## Keys to Creating Balance

Keys to creating balance include simplifying, doing what really matters, sitting and thinking, and balancing structure with spontaneity.

**Simplifying** In theory, knowing what we value most and acting on the things we value is an obvious way to live. In practice, it is something quite different. We constantly are wishing we had more time for the really important things in life. When we sit down to plan using this type of balancing, rather than asking, "What do I have to do?" we ask questions such as, "What do I *choose* to do?" or "What do I *want* to do?"

Unfortunately, day-to-day concerns occupy so much of our time that they tend to keep us from making time for these more important things. The essence of balancing the things we

### FYI

#### Time Matters

From polling people around the country, the Eyres found that people list their priorities in this order:

1. Family
2. Personal character, including beliefs, education, inner growth
3. Work or career
4. Other interests, including recreation and TV

Compare this list with how people actually spend their time:

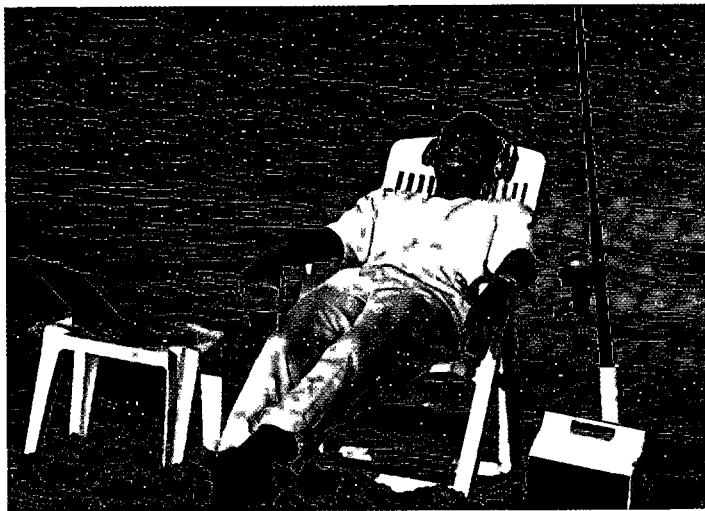
1. Other interests, including recreation and TV
2. Work or career
3. Personal character, including beliefs, education, inner growth
4. Family

While most of us need to work to support ourselves and our families, the amount of time we spend on work, recreation, TV, and other interests is considerably greater than the amount of time spent with family or on personal character building. An imbalance exists between what people value the most and how they spend their time. A healthy lifestyle reflects a balance between work, play/leisure, relationships, self-care, and rest activities.

## The Fisherman

As the story goes, a lone fisherman sat on the beach, his fishing pole planted in the sand. Along came a corporate executive on vacation. "Why don't you have two poles so you can catch more fish?" the executive asked. "Then what would I do?" asked the fisherman. "Then you could take the extra money, buy a boat, get nets and a crew, and catch even more fish." "Then what would I do?" asked the fisherman. "Then," said the executive, "you could move up to a fleet of large ships, go wholesale, and become very rich." "Then what would I do?" asked the fisherman. "Then you could do whatever you want!" shouted the executive. And the fisherman replied, "That's exactly what I'm doing right now!"

We can use this story to guide us in making decisions about what really matters in life. We work longer hours to pay for an expensive vacation so we can collapse. What if we just work less so we don't so desperately need to escape? We frantically work to increase our income so we can buy that big, expensive house only to find that we have to work even harder to maintain it. We can choose to simplify.



© George Shelley/CORBIS

*Simplifying your life can help you get in touch with what brings real peace.*

value is to simplify. We can develop the ability to simplify our days, and our lives, by regularly asking these four questions:

1. Will it matter in ten years?
2. What do I need more of in my life?
3. What do I need less of?
4. How can I make this simpler?

When we begin to ask these questions, we learn to say "no" more frequently to those things that aren't worth doing. Continually adding more things to our life has the effect of complicating and speeding up the pace of our life. Removing things from our life brings simplicity and freedom. The first step to balance our priorities is to simplify.

**Doing What Really Matters** The second aspect of balance, related to simplification, is to direct our priorities to three specific areas, then work to balance these areas. The three priorities common to everyone are:

1. *Family:* our relationships with family and friends
2. *Work/career/school:* all areas of our professional development
3. *Self:* development of our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual self and also the way we serve others, including activities with religious and community groups

To create more balance in your life, spend five minutes each day, before writing down any other plans or thinking about your schedule, deciding on the single most important thing you can do that day for family, professional development, and yourself. Imagine how many of your important goals you would accomplish if you were to focus on things that really matter.

**Don't Just Do Something—Sit There!** Planning our days involves a commitment to stop everything and spend at least five minutes stopping and doing nothing other than thinking. Before planning your schedule, give yourself some sit-down time each day to ask yourself the key questions mentioned previously.

In our solitude time, rather than asking, "What do I really want?" ask challenging, but perhaps more useful, questions such as: "What do I need?" "What do I need in my physical life?" "What do I need in my social life . . . my spiritual life . . . my intellectual and emotional life?" Get in the habit of asking yourself these questions daily—then choose the thing you need to do most and do it that day.

When do our best ideas come to us? Running around working frantically to get through the daily "to-do" list usually leaves no room for insights or ideas to pop into our awareness. Our best ideas come during times when our thinking has slowed and we aren't concentrating on anything in particular. Examples include when we are in the shower, daydreaming, sleeping-in, taking a leisurely solo stroll, driving, or just sitting. Often these insights can completely change an entire day in the direction of a more fulfilling and joyful experience. If we don't let the ideas through because of the busyness of our mind, we miss out on these best things.

**Balancing Attitude—Balancing Structure and Spontaneity** Balancing our attitude involves considering both the destination and the journey. Our culture

thrives on our reaching goals and enjoying the good feeling that comes with accomplishment. In doing this, we frequently tend to forget about the joy of the journey and the footsteps we take on the way to the goal, which are just as important as the goal itself.

The Eyres offer the comparison of the jets and the hot air balloons. The jets are the people who strive to arrive. People ride in jets to get where they are going as quickly as possible. People who dislike formal planning because of its inflexible structure say the jets lack spontaneity. People ride in hot air balloons for the sheer pleasure of riding in them. The hot air balloons are those who stop to smell the roses, who go with the flow of the wind wherever it might take them.

On our way to living our days in more fulfilling ways, we can have both—the balloon and the jet. The yin and the yang of the Taoist symbol, shown in the photo, imply that we are made up of both the jet and the hot air balloon. We feel drawn to both ways of being.

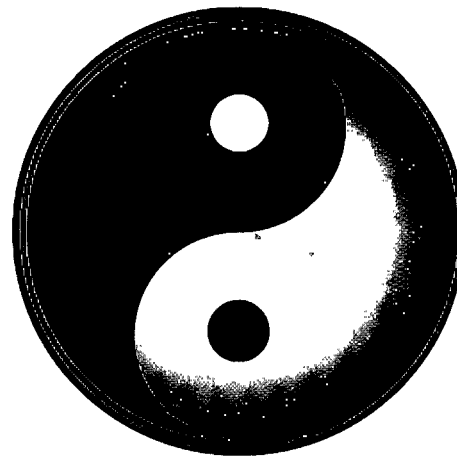
**Antiplanning** describes the attitude of setting goals and being firm about where we want to go but at the same time being flexible on how we are to get there. With our limited wisdom, we don't always know the best way to do something. If we remain open to opportunities rather than staying attached rigidly to what we have planned, we may find new directions, new opportunities, and sometimes even better goals. Antiplanning shifts our focus to a simpler attitude of enjoying each step of the journey as much as the goal we will reach.

## Author Anecdote

### Go With the Wind

While on the Happy Trails bike ride through Iowa, I met a fascinating couple, Carter and Kaye. They related an experience that exemplifies hot air balloon living. They explained that every year they meet up with a group of friends at a predetermined location. After breakfast they get on their bicycles and ride in whatever direction the wind is blowing. They continue riding for several days with no specific destination in mind. The only plan is that the wind is always at their back. By remaining open to the spontaneity of discovering whatever lies around the next bend, they have experienced some amazing adventures that they never could have planned for.

—MH



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*The Taoist yin-yang symbolizing balance.*

## Serendipity

Closely related to the Lifebalance approach to time management is the idea of serendipity. The English writer Hugh Walpole first coined the term **serendipity** to describe the quality that, through good fortune and sagacity, allows a person to discover something good while seeking something else. He came up with this word and definition after reading a Persian fable about the three princes of Serendipity.

**The Three Princes of Serendipity** The story tells of three princes who went into the world to seek their fortune. None of them achieved what they were seeking, but they each got something else, something better. One found love, one found beauty, and the third found peace.

These three men, while traveling through the world, rarely found the treasures they were looking for but continually ran into other treasures equally great or even greater which they were not seeking. In looking for one thing, they found something else, and it dawned on them that this was one of life's sly and wonderful tricks. When they realized this, they got an entirely new slant on life, and every day resulted in a new and thrilling experience.<sup>11</sup>

The essence of this principle is that the happenings you don't expect are actually the things that are supposed to happen. Other definitions for serendipity are:

- The capacity for making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident
- The gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought after<sup>12</sup>
- An unexpected discovery of something worthwhile during a search for an expected something worthwhile<sup>13</sup>

**The Keys to Serendipity** Serendipity emphasizes that:

1. We need to be working toward something. We need to set some goal(s) for ourselves and be moving in the direction of the goal(s).

2. We need to be aware, to be alert, to be observing things to realize the so-called “happy accidents” that occur as we are on the way to our original goal. If we aren’t tuning in to what is happening, we will miss things such as beauty, spontaneous moments, new and even better goals and directions, opportunities, and needs of others as they arise.

With serendipity, we can have both worlds—the jet and the hot air balloon. We can still set goals and work toward them. But the flexibility of serendipity allows us to be open to spontaneous events as they occur. We don’t treat interruptions as annoyances but, instead, as opportunities to discover something good that might add to our joy and fulfillment. Richard Eyre summed up this idea with the following thoughts:

Too much planning can make the actual experience of living almost anticlimactic. Too much thinking about a thing removes us from it. We become observers, analysts, spectators, or critics rather than participants. If we can approach life more as an experience which contains vast variety and infinite potential for surprise, we will find ourselves dealing less with “success” and “failure” and more with progress and growth. If we have to think about every detail of our lives, we ought to think about them after they have been lived (when we can learn from experience) not before and during (when the very thought may intercept or alter the experience).

Approaching life as an experience makes us, moment-to-moment, more aware of what is happening and of what we are feeling—and less aware of what we plan to have happen or wish had happened. Thus we see opportunities we could never have planned and realize far more serendipity than we otherwise could. Goals can co-exist with experience—they can shine like beacons and allow us to see our experiences more clearly in their order and light.<sup>14</sup>

Live your life each day as you would climb a mountain. An occasional glance toward the summit keeps the goal in mind, but many beautiful scenes are to be observed from each new vantage point. Climb slowly, steadily, enjoying each passing moment; and the view from the summit will serve as a fitting climax for the journey.

—HAROLD B. MELCHART

**Applying Serendipity** Knowing about serendipity and applying the principle in daily life are two very different things. Serendipity is not a common way of being for most people in our culture. We tend not to think and act this way. But we can learn to move in this more balanced direction. This activity can help get you started.

**Split-page Scheduling** Start your planning time by drawing a line down the middle of your daily planning page. The left side of this page is for our traditional scheduling of activities and planning items to do that day. The right side of the page is left blank. We will fill this side, during the day or at the end of the day, with those unanticipated needs, unforeseen opportunities, and unexpected moments that come up during the day. These are the items we could not have planned for but turn out to be as valuable as, or more valuable than, the things we had planned. The left side gets the list, and the right side gets the day’s serendipitous after-it-happens notes, such as a new acquaintance, a fresh idea, a child’s question, an unexpected opportunity, a friend’s need, a chance meeting, a beautiful sunset.

We have to be in pursuit of something (left side of the page), and we have to be aware, sensitive, and observant of those other things that we didn’t plan for (right side of the page). The right side of the page reminds us to be playful, be spontaneous, take risks, and be serendipitous.

With this type of flexibility automatically worked into our days, we create a new definition of a perfect day. A perfect day used to be one in which our high priorities, our A items, were checked off the list. Now a perfect day will still include that, but in addition, we jump the line to do the serendipitous things as well. Living in this more flowing and balanced way involves intentionally changing the way we function throughout the day. From the outside, we may not appear to be doing anything differently, but inside we manage things in vastly different ways.

Lifebalance and awareness of serendipity do not mean no plan and no goals. The guiding principle is *be strong and fixed on the destination, but be creative and flexible on the route.*<sup>15</sup>

The Lifebalance approach to time management is significantly different than the ABC123 and Quadrant Planning methods, yet all three methods can be effective in helping individuals accomplish their goals, manage their time, and relieve their stress. Next, let’s look at procrastination and explore a variety of tips on how to overcome procrastination and eliminate time wasters.

# Procrastination

**Procrastination** is the avoidance of doing a task that needs to be accomplished. This can lead to feelings of guilt, inadequacy, depression, and self-doubt. Procrastination has a high potential for stressful consequences. It interferes with our academic, professional, and personal success.

**Styles of Procrastination** Psychologist Linda Sapadin identified six styles of procrastinators.<sup>16</sup> See if any of these sound like you.

1. *Perfectionists* fear that they can't complete tasks up to their expectations. They focus on details rather than overall objectives, and they fear making mistakes.
2. *Dreamers* have big goals but fail to translate their ideas into a plan for action. They contrast with perfectionists because dreamers don't get to the details.
3. *Worriers* focus on the worst-case scenario and see the problems rather than the solutions. They tend to avoid change and risk-taking.
4. *Crisis makers* wait until the pressure mounts to take action. By waiting until the last minute to complete a task, they create excitement from a temporary rush of adrenalin—and put their projects at risk.
5. *Defiers* resist new tasks and often don't follow through on what they promise to do. They avoid teamwork and are reluctant to make agreements.
6. *Overdoers* make the job harder than it needs to be and create extra work. They fail to set priorities and refuse to delegate.

Notice that the styles of procrastination are just a collection of habits. Habits are learned, and they can be unlearned.

**Tips for Overcoming the Procrastination Habit** Here are some tips for overcoming the procrastination habit:

*Turn elephants into hors d'oeuvres.* Cut a huge task into smaller chunks so it seems less enormous.<sup>17</sup> When you can't seem to get started on a project, try breaking it down into smaller tasks and do just one of the smaller tasks or set a timer and work on the big task for only 15 minutes. If you know that your 30-page term paper is due in one month, start today by picking your topic or writing a rough outline. By doing a little at a time, you won't feel so overwhelmed, and eventually you'll reach a point where you will want to finish.

*Avoid cramming.* Despite their best intentions, students often study in ways that encourage forgetting. In addition to studying in noisy places where attention is easily diverted and interference is maximized, they often try to memorize too much at one time by cramming

FYI

## Gaining the Quality of Serendipity

- *Slow down.* Hurry tramples watchfulness and thoughtfulness. Smell the flowers, feel the sun, pause to breathe. Notice the needs of others and try to feel empathy. Sometimes, relaxing your pace can lengthen your stride.
- *Welcome surprises.* Anticipate them, look for them, expect them, and relish them. Surprises don't knock you off course; they reveal new destinations and new directions.
- *Enjoy the journey.* Look for and find joy today. Life is not a dress rehearsal.
- *Hold "Sunday Sessions."* On Sunday, look ahead to the next six days, thinking about what matters, about priorities and opportunities. These sessions adjust and refine goals as new options appear and new capacities grow.
- *Simplify and set your own standards.* Trading time for things is usually a bad deal. Trying to impress others with the newest and costliest car, fashion, brand name, address, toy, or trend is often a losing proposition.
- *Make goals without plans.* Although goals are an indispensable part of serendipity, tight, detailed plans are not. Spend your Sunday Session and other "thought time" conceptualizing your goals and laying out a general road map toward them, but acknowledge that your actual route will be some combination of the schedule and the surprise.
- *Add playfulness and humor to each day.* Lighten up and allow yourself to make mistakes, to enjoy the more humorous parts of life, to laugh like a child.
- *Take risks and follow your feelings.* The dullness of our comfort zones lulls us into a false sense of security. Living fully involves taking risks and enjoying the surprises of what might come with the risks.

**Source:** *Serendipity of the Spirit*, by R. Eyre (Salt Lake City, UT: Homebase Publishers, 1988), pp. 61–64.



### TIME TIP

"I have found that taking study breaks is one of the most efficient ways I can spend my time. By taking a stretch or walk-around-the-block break and doing some deep-breathing exercises, I get so much more done when I return to my studying. I set the length of the break, usually 10–15 minutes, so I am not tempted to procrastinate. Sometimes I even set the alarm on my watch as a reminder to get back to work."

—Troy H.

Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of an uncompleted task.

—WILLIAM JAMES



## Procrastinators Finish Last

In studies with students taking a health psychology course, researchers at Case Western Reserve University found that although procrastinating provided short-term benefits, including periods of low stress, the tendency to dawdle had long-term costs, including poorer health and lower grades. Early in the semester, the procrastinators reported less stress and fewer health problems than students who scored low on

procrastination. By the end of the semester, however, procrastinators reported more health-related symptoms, more stress, and more visits to healthcare professionals than non-procrastinators. They also were more likely to turn in their papers late and received significantly lower grades on term papers and exams.

**Source:** "Longitudinal Study of Procrastination, Performance, Stress, and Health: The Costs and Benefits of Dawdling," by D. Tice and R. Baumeister, *Psychological Science*, 8 (1997): 454-458.

### FYI

#### FYI: Cramming

Research shows that most students do most of their studying right before the test. Although an intensive review before a quiz or exam does help, you are not likely to do well in college courses if this is your major method of studying. One of the clearest findings in psychology is that spaced practice is a much more efficient way than massed practice to study and learn. Just as you wouldn't wait until the night before a big basketball game to begin practicing your free throws, you shouldn't wait until the night before an exam to begin studying.

**Source:** "Measuring study time distributions: Implications for designing computer-based courses," by Roman Taraban and William S. Maki, *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 31.2 (1999): 263-269.

the night before an exam.<sup>18</sup> The single most important key to improving grades may be **distributed study time**, which refers to spacing your learning periods with rest periods between sessions. Cramming is called **massed study** because the time spent learning is massed into long, unbroken intervals. A comparison of 63 separate studies found that distributed study produced superior memory and learning compared to massed study.<sup>19</sup>

**Manage your time zappers.** A significant deterrent to successful time management is the **time zapper**, something that takes time away from what is more important. In Chapter 14 you will learn more about how technology

can affect stress, but consider how Facebook or texting may be wasting your time. Probably the most significant time zapper is television viewing.

Television viewing is a time zapper because it steals time that we could be spending on things that are more important. Imagine what you could accomplish if you were to spend those four hours working on more productive things such as learning a foreign language or how to play a new instrument or even doing homework. Time zappers include driving from place to place, videogames, unnecessary meetings, excess socializing, oversleeping, talking on the phone, surfing the Internet, and worrying. You probably can think of many other things that would fall into the category of time zappers.

### FYI

#### A Time Zapper

*The World Almanac and Book of Facts* reported that people view television on average for 4.3 hours per day. College-aged students, in the same report, reported watching television an average of 3.3 hours per day.

**Source:** *World Almanac and Book of Facts* (New York: World Almanac Education Group, 2004), p. 268.

### Stress Busting Behavior

#### TIME ZAPPERS

What are your greatest time zappers? Check those items in the list that sometimes zap your time.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surfing the Internet   | <input type="checkbox"/> Looking for something you misplaced |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading/writing e-mail | <input type="checkbox"/> Instant messaging                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shuffling papers       | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing video/computer games        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking on the phone   | <input type="checkbox"/> Text messaging                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watching TV            | <input type="checkbox"/> Updating Facebook                   |

Having discovered your time zappers, make a personal commitment to spend your time more wisely. Eliminating those things that waste your time can do a lot to relieve your stress.

The best way to manage time zappers is by *planning*. This chapter has suggested several excellent ways to do this. When you decide what the order of your activities will be through the day and you follow through with discipline while maintaining appropriate flexibility, you will have an easier time saying "no" to the things that waste so much of your time.

*Work hardest during your "best times" of the day.* Most of us can identify two or three hours during the day when we are most productive. Are you a "morning person," a "night owl," or do you do your finest work in late afternoon? During our own particular best times we usually have the most energy and are the most creative. Try to schedule your time so your most important activities can be done during these best times of the day.

*Keep an activity log.* Just as a nutrition log is a record of everything you eat over a period of time, an activity log allows you to see what you do with your time. Without modifying your behavior, record everything you do, as you do it, from the moment you awaken until you go to bed. Every time you move from one activity, say eating breakfast, to watching the morning news, to the time you spend getting dressed, make a note of the time in your time log. After doing this for a few days, look carefully at what your log tells you about how you spend your time. You may be surprised at how much time you spend doing things that might be considered a waste of time or have little value for you or anyone else.

*Choose to refuse.* Learn to say "no" to the unimportant or less important things. Most of us have difficulty saying "no," but this becomes easier when we focus on our goals. You have to be convinced that you and your priorities are important. Before you agree to undertake any additional tasks, ask yourself if those tasks or activities will lead you in the direction of your goals and priorities. Saying "no" to extra projects, social activities, and invitations you know you don't have the time or energy for can prevent a lot of unnecessary worry, guilt, and wasted emotional energy down the road.

*Try delegating.* Rethink the old saying, "If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself." If some things don't require your personal attention, delegate them to someone else.

*Establish levels of acceptable perfection.* It is human nature to want to do our best on every task. We have difficulty sometimes submitting work that may not reflect our best performance. Frequently, though, some things we do don't necessarily require anything approaching perfection. When this is the case, complete the task at an appropriate level, depending upon the importance of the item. E-mails sent to a friend do not require perfect grammar and perfect spelling. Take a realistic look at similar tasks and determine which can be your "good" work and which should be your "best."

*Do the most difficult or most unpleasant tasks first.* Once you have the tough tasks out of the



© Emmanuel Faure/Tea/Getty Images

*Do you ever watch TV as a means of procrastination to avoid doing something? Watching television is one of the most common ways we waste time.*

### Author Anecdote

#### A Waste of Time

We don't need to completely eliminate time wasters, but frequently they take up so much of our time that little is left for us to do the important things that have higher priority for us. One day while we were discussing this principle in class, a student in the back of the room raised his hand and proudly declared that he had played a videogame for 24 hours straight. He took only brief breaks as needed, then quickly resumed his videogame marathon. When I asked him how he felt about that, he mentioned that the time went quickly and it was an enjoyable experience. He did mention that it probably was not time well spent, though. The rest of us in the class agreed.

—MO

## Author Anecdote

### 92 Is Still an A

Greg was one of those students who wasn't satisfied with any grade less than an A. Not only that, but he felt like a failure if he didn't receive every single point on every single assignment. A grade of 95 left him asking, "How did I fail to achieve 100?"

As an assignment in my health promotion class, the students set a goal and developed a contract for improving health in an area of their choosing. Greg decided to work on stress management. He realized that his drive for perfection was driving him into a state of constant stress. As one of his interventions, Greg came up with the creative idea of posting notes everywhere—in his car, at his desk, in his notebook—with the simple message, "92 is still an A" Gradually, this simple reminder to himself allowed Greg to put things in perspective and realize that he didn't have to be perfect at everything. He still could accomplish his goal of earning an A in class, but with much less self-induced pressure.

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way, you are freer to enjoy other tasks that are more pleasant and fun. The most unpleasant tasks usually are the ones that rank more highly on our priorities list. When we do those first, we earn the satisfaction and inner peace that comes from doing those things.

*Use "wasted" time.* Time we spend sitting in the doctor's office or waiting for an oil change can be useful downtime. Read a novel, take some deep breaths, or practice visualization. You can even use these times to write in a journal.

*Enjoy the process.* Ask yourself how you can do the task *and* have fun in the process. Maybe you can do your homework with your best friend or go to a place with a stunning view of nature and do your homework there. If you know that something has to be done but is unpleasant to even think about, ask yourself how you can add

something enjoyable to the process. Maybe you somehow can make it a game or competition with someone else.

*Reward yourself.* Even for small successes, celebrate the achievement of goals. Promise yourself a reward for completing each task, or finishing the entire task. Then keep your promise to yourself and indulge in your reward. Doing so will help you maintain the necessary balance between work and play. As time management author Ann McGee-Cooper says, "If we learn to balance excellence in work with excellence in play, fun, and relaxation, our lives become happier, healthier, and a great deal more creative."<sup>19</sup>

*Let some things go undone.* Follow the advice of Lin Yu Tang, 20th century essayist and philosopher, who said, "Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the more noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of nonessentials." Let it be okay not to finish some things, and even not to do some things that are on your list. An incomplete list has only the meaning you give to it. It doesn't mean you are not being effective, and it certainly doesn't mean you are a failure. You decide what can be left undone, and you can allow yourself to be okay with that.

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, how you spend your time, and what events you participate in every moment of each day, is your choice. You may think you *have to* be in a class at a specific time, or you *must* be at work during a specific time period. No life requirement says you *have to* be there. Although not showing up to work has consequences, you still have a choice. The point is that we decide what we do with the 24 hours of our day, or 168 hours of our week.

As you make those choices, don't mistake activity for achievement. Take time to pause from time to time and remind yourself of where you are going and how you want to get there. Henry David Thoreau once said, "It is not enough to be busy; so are the ants. The question is, what are we busy about?"

In this chapter you learned three time management systems. All are designed to help you gain more control of your life and thereby reduce your stress and enhance your well-being. You will find that planning sets you free. Experiment with these systems, and determine which has the most appeal to you and your current circumstances.

We introduced a new way of looking at time, called serendipity, as a way to have both the stability of working toward the destination and the freedom to enjoy the journey along the way. You also learned tips for overcoming procrastination and eliminating time zappers. You can reduce your stress by focusing on the things that matter. In the end, time management is really more about managing yourself and your life than it is about managing time. You replace "I don't have enough time" with "I have plenty of time for what matters to me."