Time Management Skills

WHICH ARE YOU—a chatty Kathy, a fire fighter, or a perfectionist? Do you spend more time talking to people, handling emergencies, or trying to make things run perfectly? This unit will help you understand concepts, skills, and strategies related to time management. Let us spend some time on how to spend your time!



Objective:

- Explain time management concepts, skills, and strategies.

Key Terms:

contingency plan
controlled flexibility
daydreaming
delegation
goal
goal setting
matrix
multitasking
outsourcing
prioritization
procrastination
SMART goals
spam
streamlining
stress
time management

How to Manage Your Time

TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Time management is time budgeting: the act or process of systematically controlling the time spent on specific activities. Time management is a necessary skill, as time cannot be stored for later use.

Time Management Personalities

Susan Ward discusses different time management personalities in the web article "Time Management Personality Types" (http://sbinfocanada.about.com/cs/timemanagement/a/timetypes.htm). She divides time management personalities into five categories. The "Fire

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Fighter" always has a crisis and is always rushed. The "Over-Committer" can't say no and has too many projects. The "Aquarian" avoids managing time and is too laid back. "Chatty Kathy," a socializer, has long conversations and puts off tasks. The "Perfectionist" is compulsive about getting things perfect. Which personality type are you?

Steps to Improving Time Management Skills

How might you improve your time management skills? As you think about improving, use the following steps.

Step 1: Take a Personal Time Inventory

This step involves doing some calculations. First, add up the time required for school, work, family commitments, and extracurricular school activities. Second, add up the time necessary for personal needs, such as eating, sleeping, and grooming. How much time do you have left for other things?

Step 2: Identify Problem Areas

By searching the Internet, you can find free programs available for keeping track of daily activities. Using a tracking tool for two weeks, record time used on daily activities. Determine how much time you spend on more important and less important tasks. Are you spending too much time on less important items? Identify problem areas that you would like to improve. Think about your time management personality, and ask yourself, "How is my time management personality contributing to these problem areas?"

Step 3: Set Goals and Priorities

Your next step is to decide what time management changes you want to make and to set goals and priorities. **Goal setting** is a concentrated effort to achieve concrete targets (goals or objectives). Each goal must be well defined, an action plan devised, and a period set to actualize the goal. A **goal** is the desired outcome of the action plan. Goal setting is a powerful tool for planning and realizing the future in achievable segments.

SMART goals are goals that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound. Goals use positive outcomes and are usually categorized as either short-term or long-term. Short-term goals are time-specific and may be as short as "over the next few minutes" to as long as "in the next 10 years." Long-term goals are accomplished across a lifetime, such as career goals, income goals, education goals, family goals, and health and fitness goals.

Prioritization is the establishment of an order of importance. The result is a ranking system that allows you to complete "first things first." Prioritization is necessary when you have more than one goal competing for time.

Several prioritization systems exist, including:

- Must Do (highest priority), Should Do, Nice to Do
- Numerical ranking systems (1 = highest priority, 4 = lowest priority)

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DIGGING DEEPER...

UNCOVERING ADDITIONAL FACTS: Specific Skills

There are different kinds of time management skills. When thinking about time management skills, consider the following abilities: keeping paper documents in order with effective filing systems; managing information, such as contact information of coworkers, digital documents, and important data with software; organizing and replying to e-mails; and managing daily schedules with calendars and reminders. Other skills are managing conversations by keeping them short and focused on the main points, improving concentration and staying on task, and using motivational tricks for maintaining personal drive. These skills are needed whether working onsite or from home. Dig deeper into these specific skills at the following web resource: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_HTE.htm#list.

- Four-Quadrant Urgent-Important Matrix: (1) Urgent and Important; (2) Not Urgent but Important; (3) Urgent but Not Important; (4) Not Urgent and Not Important

There are also "listing tools" that help organize your time, including:

- Priority lists
- Task lists
- "To do" lists
- Appointment calendars
- Matrices (A **matrix** is a diagram of numbers, symbols, or words.)

Evaluating Your Time Management Expertise

As a part of setting your goals and working with prioritization, you also need to consider your current level of expertise with time management. There are online tools, some of which are free, that you can use for this. For example, you can use the web quiz, "How Good Is Your Time Management?" at http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_88.htm. This tool will help you discover your time management tendencies and what specific skills you may need for improving time management.

TIME WASTERS

Time wasters take time away from things that are important to one's goals. Next you will read about computer-related, habit-related, and workplace-related time wasters.

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Computer-Related Time Wasters

Following are examples of computer-related time wasters.

- **Spam** is an electronic version of junk mail—unsolicited e-mail or text messages sent to computers and/or cell phones. This type of e-mail is a time waster.
- Online games are time wasters.
- Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, Myspace, Pinterest, Ning, and CafeMom, are labeled as the web's "ultimate time sink" in Ben Parr's web article "You Spend 8 Hours per Month on Facebook [STATS]" (http://mashable.com/2011/09/30/wasting-time-on-facebook/). Statistics show that in *one month*, the average U.S. Internet user spends 7 hours 46 minutes on Facebook; 5 hours 46 minutes on other social networks; 2 hours 53 minutes on AOL; 2 hours 12 minutes on Yahoo!; and 1 hour 41 minutes on YouTube.



FIGURE 1. Time wasters take time away from things that are important to one's goals.

Habit-Related Time Wasters

Daydreaming is a pleasing dreamlike fantasy indulged in while awake and/or thoughts that distract one from other tasks. **Procrastination** is the putting off, postponing, or deferring of activities or actions to another day or later time. **Stress** is mental, emotional, or physical strain. Daydreaming, procrastination, and stress are all habits that waste time.



FIGURE 2. Daydreaming is a pleasing dreamlike fantasy indulged in while awake and/or thoughts that distract one from other tasks.

Workplace-Related Time Wasters

Typical work interruptions include telephone calls, drop-in visitors, and e-mail. Emergencies or unexpected events are unpredictable and must be dealt with immediately. A **contingency plan** is a set of predetermined steps to follow for an anticipated future emergency or disaster situation: a plan B. Should an emergency become a reality,

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an action plan, with organized and coordinated steps must be followed. Examples of emergencies include a hurricane, fire, or tornado (evacuation plan); an environmental disaster, such as a hazardous waste spill; an injury or robbery; or decreased funding for a program. Despite the possibility of a negative effect on productivity, emergency plans must be followed when needed!

TIME MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Organization

Organization is essential for the effective time management of a task or project. Organizing the time allotted into smaller episodes allows for short breaks and fun activities between times-on-task. Put goals and activities in order according to their importance or urgency.

Delegation

Delegation is the conferring (authorizing) of part of one's power to another. A common delegation practice of a small business owner is to find a partner or hire a specialist, such as an accountant.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing is purchasing goods or services from another provider via a contract. Typically, businesses use outsourcing when contracting work to another organization is less expensive than doing it internally. For example, instead of paying a bookkeeper as an employee, a company outsources bookkeeping to an external accounting service. Thus, outsourcing is a cost-saving and time management solution for many companies.

Streamlining

Streamlining is improving the efficiency of a process or an organization. Streamlining is simplifying, reorganizing, or reducing the number of steps in a process; reorganizing a company's departments; or taking an alternative approach to a task. By cutting out unneeded steps, the company saves time.

Multitasking

Multitasking is carrying out two or more tasks at the same time. Computers can complete concurrent processing tasks simultaneously. As for humans, we more likely to shift our focus from one thing to the next rather than truly multitask: the brain actually switches between two tasks very quickly.

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Controlled Flexibility

Controlled flexibility is the ability to modify business practices in a precise and accommodating manner. Finding a balance between rigid control and flexibility in task or project management is essential. Tight schedules prevent one from actively prioritizing tasks. Too flexible schedules may allow important and urgent tasks to go uncompleted.

Summary:



Time management is time budgeting: the act or process of systematically controlling the time spent on specific activities. People have different time personalities. The "Fire Fighter" always has a crisis and is always rushed. The "Over-Committer" can't say no and has too many projects. The "Aquarian" avoids managing time and is too laid back. "Chatty Kathy," a socializer, has long conversations and puts off tasks. The "Perfectionist" is compulsive about getting things perfect.

Three steps to improving time management are taking a personal time inventory, identifying problem areas, and setting goals and priorities. SMART goals are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound. Prioritization is the establishment of an order of importance in your tasks.

Time wasters fall into the categories of computer-related, habit-related, and workplace-related. Computer-related time wasters are spam e-mails, online games, and social networking sites. Habit-related time wasters are daydreaming, procrastination, and stress. Workplace-related time wasters are telephone calls, drop-in visits, and e-mail. Time management practices include organization, delegation, outsourcing, streamlining, multitasking, and controlled flexibility.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What five time management personalities are presented in this unit?
2. What are three steps for improving time management?
3. What does the acronym SMART stand for in relation to goals?
4. What are two examples of computer-related time wasters?
5. List four time management practices.

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Conduct Internet research on time management software. List five different companies, the names of their software, the prices, and descriptions of how the various types of software intend to help with time management.

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Web Links:



Welcome to Time Management

http://www.time-management-basics.com/#

Personal Goal Setting

http://www.mindtools.com/page6.html

Time Management Basics: Get on Top of Life Today

http://www.pickthebrain.com/blog/time-management-basics-get-on-top-of-life-today/

Multitasking Gets You There Later

http://www.infoq.com/articles/multitasking-problems

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