

Save Time and Lower Your Stress Level

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As another new school year approaches, it is a good time to take stock of your time management skills since “lack of time” is often cited as a major contributor to a person’s stress level. If you find that you are always rushing to meet deadlines or appointments but find little time for relaxation, here are some strategies to help keep you in the pilot’s seat when time starts to fly.

Be Honest With Yourself

As much as we would like to blame our lack of time on a host of other factors or persons, much of it is really in our control. Take some time to honestly review the level of time you spend each week on the various parts of your life such as work, family, commuting, hobbies etc. Think of it as a checkbook balance sheet. Where are your deficits and overdraws? Where can you buy some time by sharing, delegating or eliminating unnecessary tasks or projects?



**Time may fly, but we
can be the pilot.
--Anonymous**

Find out your time management style so you will be better able to focus on the areas that you need to change so you can achieve your goals by taking the Mind Tools test. Click on the link below and scroll to the test: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_88.htm#Table

Break It Down

Any large project can be daunting at first glance whether it is planning a big social event, a year-long budget review or a curriculum project. The fact is every whole is made up of smaller parts. Focus on breaking the project down into smaller, achievable tasks in a logical sequence. Try to create a timeline for each task so you can track your progress.

If you get stuck with a mental block or stressed about what to do next along the way, try one of these strategies to help re-focus:

- Get up and moving for a few minutes by doing some jumping jacks, running in place or taking a brisk walk around the building. Aerobic activity stimulates endorphins which are the brains “feel good” neurotransmitters that will help to “clear” the fog.
- Do some deep, slow breaths for a minute or two to calm you by reversing the adrenalin surge anxiety can produce.
- Get up and stretch from head to toe to stimulate blood flow which diminishes joint stress and helps to relax.
- Take a few minutes to focus on a time when you were relaxed and having fun. Recreate the scene in your mind.
- Another quick fix is to put your elbows on the desk and close your eyes. Place your hands over your closed eyes and look at the colors you see. Try to make the colors blend into a black pallet.

Don’t forget to reward yourself when you do achieve those accomplishments!

Prioritize, Prioritize

Prioritizing helps to direct your energy and focus to the tasks at hand that are most urgent. An easy strategy recommended by organizational experts is to make a list of the tasks or projects you need to

accomplish the next day before going home from work. This will help to prepare you mentally and give you a head start when you get in the next day.

Once you complete the list, assign a label of urgency to each item. The urgency label should be something that works best for you, like a one to three category, with one being the most important and three the least important or an alphabetical or color coding system.

Prioritizing also gives you an opportunity to assess the resources you will need to invest in the each task or project so you can better manage your time. However, be careful not to prioritize yourself in to oblivion. The trick is to be realistic about just how much you can accomplish in one day. Remember, you need to include some relaxation time to keep that balance in each day.

Be Flexible

Priorities often change, particularly in light of new information. So the project you are half way through may need to be put on hold as the one your manager just handed you takes front and center. Being resilient is important in managing our time and our stress level. As Darwin said "It is not the strongest of species that survives, or the most intelligent; but the one most responsive to change".

Planning for change or delays is an important consideration in time management. We never know when our computer may crash or the package will get lost in the mail, so giving yourself some wiggle room will keep you on track and your stress at bay.

Get Organized

Developing daily rituals can help immensely with time management. Organizational experts tout that 10 minutes of preparation the night before can save up to an hour the next day. Make it a habit to think ahead, review your schedule at least a week in advance to troubleshoot for conflicts.

One of the best investments is to purchase a large calendar or daily minder that works for you and your family. Write every commitment for every family member on the calendar, the visual will help you and your family see in advance which days are going to be the most hectic. This way you can make a plan and consider how you will cope with those hectic days so that you can still give some time back to yourself.

Tame the Paper Tigers

Paper clutter at work and home can create time challenges, missed appointments and delays in action. Develop a simple system to keep the clutter down by setting up a means to organize the papers. Get in the habit of immediately tossing junk mail, catalogs or unsolicited mail. Use a simple organizational system of folders or boxes labeled: "act on", "file" and "pass on". Set a goal to not have papers lying around without an action plan for more than a day. This will buy you time that might otherwise be lost searching for important papers.

By breaking things up in to small steps, organizing and prioritizing you will make time work for you so that you have more time for you.

Go to these sites to get further resources on time management and organizational skills:

Time Management: Tips to reduce stress and improve productivity

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/time-management/WL00048>

Six Tips for Better Time Management

<http://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/6-tips-for-better-time-management>

Mind Tools – Beat Work Overload http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_HTE.htm

Getting organized: What Do You Really Value?

<http://parenting.ivillage.com/mom/organization/0,,40lr-2,00.html>

The ABC's of Household Paper Management

<http://organizedhome.com/paper-chase-abc-household-paper-management>

How to Get Organized-Finally!

<http://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/how-to-get-organized>

**“Finish each day
and be done with it.
You have done what you can.
Some blunders and absurdities
no doubt crept in.
Forget them as soon as you can.
Tomorrow is a new day.
You shall begin it
well and serenely.”**

~Ralph Waldo Emerson