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Columnist

Professional Development

Time's a flyin'

So many tasks, so little time. Steven Covey is right; it's not time management we need, it's self-management.

Most of us want more balance in our lives. Between handling our work, family, community, household, and personal responsibilities, there's hardly time to sleep. I keep reading about how Americans are sleep deprived and, of course, that makes us less effective at managing our waking hours.

Here are the first of ten suggestions for managing our time and ourselves.

Schedule your day. I recently took a TeleClass in time management. The course leader suggested that we schedule only a half-day's activities because most of us try to do too much in a day and end up feeling frustrated when we don't get it all done. By planning for only half a day, we don't get concerned when tasks take longer than expected, or interruptions throw us off schedule. Be realistic about how much you can get done in an hour and schedule accordingly. If you get everything done in time, then work on something else.

You can schedule at the end of a workday for the next day, or schedule first thing in the morning.

Set a timer. If you plan for four hours, let's say you're going to make calls and send emails, work on a project, file and straighten your office, and do work for clients. Set a timer for one hour. When it rings, you can either finish one task or start another and come back to the first one later. This is a good way to determine how long it takes you to do each type of task.

Set boundaries. Others' demands and interruptions can lead the best plans astray. I used to work at a television station in Louisville, KY. The program director's assistant used to eat lunch in her office instead of leaving for an hour. She would lock her door and not answer knocks or phone calls even though we knew she was in there. Back then I got a little peeved at her for not opening the door when I knocked, but now I admire her ability to set boundaries and stick with them.

If you promised your child you'd be at her soccer game at 5:00, then leave the office in time to be there no matter how much work you left undone. Finish it tomorrow.

Learn to say no. This is related to setting boundaries. If you try to be all things to all people and drop everything to satisfy others' demands, you'll never get your work done. Schedule a time to work with them later.

But what if it's your boss who interrupts you? Then you have to decide, or ask him/her, which is most important for you to do right then.

When I worked for WSPA-TV, one month I was given more special projects than I could get done. I remember flying to New York to do promos for the station while writing a news series on the plane. One day the news director gave me another huge task and I knew I was pushed to the point of not being able to get everything done. I told him I couldn't take on the new assignment and do justice to the others. He understood and gave the task to someone else.

Delegate. No one can do it all. Some people have trouble believing others can do things as well as they can, so they have trouble delegating. If you're fortunate to have a staff, then let them handle more of your tasks. If you work alone, then hire someone part time to do office work or pay a family member to help you. At least hire someone to clean house for you and free up more time for your work.

I intended to give you ten suggestions in this column but after writing it, found it was too long for my allotted space. So I'll give the other five next time.

I scheduled one hour to hand-write this column on my deck in today's beautiful weather, then type it and send it in. It took two hours, with no interruptions. Good thing I've only scheduled four hours today.

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