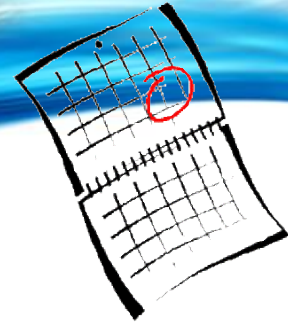


Tips for Time Management

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Growing up, and into my early adult years, I would always feel guilty if I was consciously wasting time or procrastinating. When working on a project, I inherently felt that I was doing something wrong if I was not constantly working. At the same time, exerting constant effort was often a precursor to anxiety and burnout.

Whenever I thought of the phrase “time-management,” I instinctively felt it meant “never be lazy; never waste time; always be working so you will be productive.” As I found myself responsible for more tasks, I started making checklists. This helped keep all the tasks from slipping from memory (two weeks before one semester my list topped 57!). However checklists did not solve the larger problem of burnout and having a healthy life balance.

After discovering Stephen Covey’s book, “The 7-Habits of Highly Effective People,” I realized that effective time management is most certainly a skill. It is something that can be practiced, evaluated, and improved. As with many learned-skills, the trial and error process takes time, and you should not expect to be great at it right away even when you are aware of a good strategy. Part of the process is discovering how your mind and body react to different situations, and you can only learn that through experience and time.

When I finally decided to try the techniques described in the “7-Habits” book, it took me a good two hours on a Sunday morning to plan out my week. After a couple of months of this type of planning, I became much faster at it, but to this day I still take the time to really think through my tasks and plan them out accordingly. The result is that I have more responsibilities than I have ever had; I am completing more tasks than I have ever had; but the feeling I experience is the exact opposite. I feel as if I have much more time than ever before. I am able to balance my family, personal, and professional life with confidence. What used to be feelings of burnout is often replaced by a sense of increased energy.

While my ultimate advice is to read the “7-Habits” book to discover what specifically works for you, I offer some of the following tips regarding time-management.

- ❖ Make and keep simple promises to yourself. If you can’t follow through with the promise, don’t make it. Your success at this will build your personal integrity and prepare you to make and keep promises to others.
- ❖ Be efficient with things but not with people. If a task involves another person, schedule more time than you think you need. If you cutoff a conversation before it has reached its natural conclusion, it may result in undue tension, misunderstanding, and conflict.
- ❖ Read the chapters of the “7-Habits” book that talk about time-management Quadrants 1, 2, 3, and 4. Take one week, and simply observe how your own actions fall into those quadrants. Notice the same for the actions of others. Afterwards, see if you can start eliminating your Quadrant 1 tasks, and try your hand at scheduling your week in the manner described in the book.
- ❖ Once you gain control of these planning techniques, some situations will occasionally call for you to be out of balance. However, these times will be few and far between, you will be aware of what is going on, and you will have the tools to regain a healthy life balance quickly.