

Balancing Life and Work and Managing Time

*On the Cutting Edge: Preparing for an Academic Career in the Geosciences: Workshop
for Graduate Students and Post-Doctoral Fellows*

Sunday, August 1 2010, 11 am to 12 pm

Presented by Katryn Wiese City College of San Francisco

#1: SET YOUR PRIORITIES

Don't let others choose your priorities for you. Identify your own values and how you want to live your life, and make choices that align with those values and priorities. *(This is especially important as we exit graduate school and enter a tenure-track position. Many people have many opinions on how we should proceed and what sacrifices we should be willing to make.)* "Failing to get tenure is not the worst thing that could happen to you; living a valueless life is much worse." (Randy Richardson, 2007)

Example:

#1: My mental, spiritual, physical health

#2: My family

#3: My job

a) The students

b) My future career desires

c) My own academic education

d) My department

e) The college as a whole

#4: My friends, home, etc.

Shouldn't everyone's #1 priority be his or her own health?

In an airplane, you have to put on your own oxygen mask before that of your child.

Is your career more important than your health?

Is your relationship more important than your health?

Is the image you present more important than your health?

What good are you to anyone else if you're not taking care of yourself?

PRIORITIZE YOUR TO-DO LIST AND SCHEDULE

Make sure you've scheduled sufficient time for your #1 priority (to keep it in satisfactory order) before moving on to #2 priorities. And so on...

SUGGESTION: *Some people like to schedule everything; some like to schedule just some. But items that aren't being done, but really need to be done, can be scheduled, like classes or appointments.*

PRIORITY REVIEW: Below, take a few minutes to make an ordered list of your priorities.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00 AM							
6:30 AM							
7:00 AM							
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#2: LEARN TO SAY NO

Just because an opportunity arises that you really want to do or that you feel a deep sense of obligation to do doesn't mean you should do it. If you sign up for too much, you will go crazy trying to get it all done. Your stress levels go up; your health deteriorates; and you can no longer meet all your commitments and responsibilities in the way you would like (including the responsibilities you have to yourself – for relaxation and down time).

OPTIONS FOR SAYING NO (*options modified and synthesized from a multitude of online sources*)

Someone comes to you to ask if you will assist with a project of theirs. Here are possible responses:

- *"No, but thank you for thinking of me." (Direct and without explanation)*
- *"I know you've been working hard on this project and would like some help, but I'm sorry, I really can't help." (Direct, but also compassionate about their situation, yet without an explanation)*
- *"I'm sorry, I can't help you with this project because I'm already overcommitted on too many other projects." (Direct with an explanation.)*
- *"I'm sorry – I would love to help out, but I'm currently overcommitted elsewhere. Can you keep me in mind for the future?" (Direct with an explanation and an invitation to try again later.)*
- *"You know, I really want to help out, but I know that right now I just won't be able to give you and this project the time and commitment it deserves. So I have to say no. Thank you for asking." (Direct with an explanation, with compassion, and with an enthusiasm that might elicit future invitations.)*
- *"I can't help you with this project this week, but if there's still help you need in two weeks, let me know and I'll see what I can do." (Raincheck...)*
- *"I don't have time right now to help you with this project, but is there some reason you think I would be helpful?" (Seeking more information...)*
- *"It doesn't seem likely, but let me check my schedule, and I'll get back to you in 24 hours/ two days/ next week..." (Giving yourself time to carefully consider...)*
- *"I'm sorry, it's my policy to consider all new commitment requests for 24 hours before responding. I'll let you know tomorrow. Thanks." (Refer to your policies to give you consideration time.)*
- *"The only way for me to say yes to you is to give up something else I'm doing. Let me see whether that's possible. I'll get back to you." (Another way to give yourself time to consider...)*
- *"Where does this project fit in our priorities? Can you suggest what other projects I'm currently juggling should take backseat to this one?" (If the request comes from a boss or someone else you have ongoing projects with....)*
- *"I'm sorry, I can't work on this project right now. But Mary would be great or even better – have you talked with her?" (Recommend someone else who might be better...)*
- *"I'm overcommitted right now. But I can find time, if you can find someone to help me with X, Y, or Z." (Quid pro quo...)*
- *"I'm sorry, I don't have time right now to do all you ask, but I'd be happy to work on this smaller piece." (Reducing the request and accepting a smaller part of it...)*

FURTHER STRATEGIES & TIPS FOR SAYING NO

- Remember that people respect you more if you're honest and straightforward.
- Have a policy that says you won't (even if you have time) say yes to any requests that must be completed in the next 24 hours (set a standard that folks need to give you time if they want your commitment – good for students and coworkers).
- Don't hesitate to say you're busy, even if the "busy" is personal time that you've scheduled. That should be equally important to other commitments.
- Be firm and polite. You can be sympathetic, but don't appear wishy washy, or they'll push.
- You don't need to provide lengthy explanations about why you can't do something. Keep it simple – it just doesn't fit in your schedule. Otherwise you sound defensive and encourage further pushing.

#3: AVOID TIME PITS

- Set time limits on activities in which you lose track of time *like unscheduled office hours, e-mail, web design, graphics, etc.*
- More time spent on a task does NOT mean higher quality, but it does mean a different product.
- Give up on perfection—it's endless and impossible.

Dinner example:

How much time do you have to cook dinner?

If you have an hour, you will create a different meal than if you have 5 minutes or an entire day.

Is one kind of meal better than another?

Which option best helps you meet your top priorities?

MORE SUGGESTIONS...

- Do the highest priority tasks ASAP— something else ALWAYS comes up. (Just because it's not due doesn't mean you should wait on it.)
- Do the easy stuff right away (don't waste time assessing it and putting it aside multiple times)
- Schedule exercise into your work week (at school).
- Schedule time when you won't work (like evenings, weekends, or mornings). This down time forces you to be more efficient at work (refraining from distractions and idle conversations during the day).
- Make your scheduled personal time unchangeable except for emergencies. (Treat like a class.)
- Focus on getting at least one BIG thing done daily.
- Keep a To-Do or Tasks List and Calendar (many software programs can help, like Google calendar)
- Use a calendar with moveable sections/tasks, so you can keep track of tasks, even if you need to move them. You can use this process to schedule projects and set goals.
- Break large projects into small steps and goals. Schedule each.
- Stay organized on desk and desktop (computer) – purge excess paper
- Make clear delineation between personal and work time
- Write notes at the end of the day to record where you are and where you want to start again the next day. This process can help you get on track the next day faster.
- Meet students in common areas so it's easier to exit at the end of the allotted time
- Reduce distractions by hiding, or closing door up to a crack, and/or having sign on door explaining you are "writing" or "grading" or ...
- Avoid checking e-mail, internet, or answering phone as soon as they present themselves – instead set aside time specifically for those tasks
- Avoid doing **e-mail** first thing in the morning – get something on your To-Do list done first
- Avoid overcommitment— Learn to say NO