

Life Balance and Time Management

On the Cutting Edge: Early Career Geoscience Faculty Workshop – June 2011

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(Some of this material was drawn from a previous handout by Katryn Wiese, City College of San Francisco)

The ability to manage time well is an absolutely essential skill for all faculty members. Very few of us feel that we have enough time to do all of the things that we want to do. How many of us feel that our lives are balanced, and that we have all of the time we want for work-related responsibilities, our family, and our personal activities?

For junior faculty, the added pressure of "being everything to everyone" in order to attain tenure makes us frequently feel out of control. The good news is that we don't have to put 100% of our energy into the work place and sacrifice everything else in the process of obtaining tenure. In fact, the truth is that in the grand scheme of things, the Universities and Colleges we work for would prefer that we have a stable personal life: a stable personal life results in stability in the work place as well. In my personal experience my supervisor was more than happy to see me enter in to personal relationships that took time away from my 14-h/day, 7 day/week self-imposed work schedule but might end in a stable home life and a more permanent tenure at the institution, i.e., in his view single people with no personal life were more likely to be "gypsies", moving on to another job because no ties held them in place.

This doesn't mean that the triad of "Teaching", "Research", and "Service", or "Teaching", Teaching", and "Service", lessens in importance for us - it doesn't. But, we should work to attain balance in everything: between work and personal life; in work, among the triad; and in our personal life, among family, our personal health, our own hobbies, and our friends.

Current calendar:

How many of you have a weekly or monthly calendar on which you plan out your days and weeks? (Not even thinking about planning out your years on the tenure clock).

For the next 5 minutes, as best you can fill out the first blank weekly calendar with a "typical" week from last semester.

Value-based Time Management:

Our basic goal in organization of our time should be to achieve "value based time management." In other words, we should find ways to spend our time doing the things that are most important to us, and we should balance the expenditure of our time based on the priorities that we set based on our personal governing values.

1) Governing Values

It may seem rather frivolous to make lists of such lofty ideas as "our governing values" and yet sometimes this process can provide an anchor (or rock) in a life that can often spin out of control. Your governing values are the foundation of your personal fulfillment. Abraham Maslow expressed this paradigmatic insight when he wrote, "Self-actualization is a bringing together of what I do and what I really value." A governing value can be something as simple and as enormous as "I want to be happy" "I want to make others happy" "I want to be a (good) example for my students" "I want to improve the lives of others" "I want my family to have a good life" "I want to be an international expert in my field". The simple statement of your governing values will help to set the stage for your priorities in life and work.

Take a minute to think about your governing values. Write one or two down if you like.

2) Long-Range and Intermediate Goals

Your goal is to prioritize your time based on your values. Having determined your governing values, it follows logically that you can create long-range goals that are based on these values. From the long-range goals, one can develop intermediate goals, toward which daily tasks can be oriented.

What are your long-range goals and objectives over the next 5-10 years? Include your personal life as well as your career. What are some intermediate objectives (e.g., tenure, marriage) to get you to the long-range goals? Write down some long-range and intermediate goals and objectives. Again, this is a list you can add to or refine later.

3) Shorter-range (1-year) Goals

What needs to be done in the coming year to make good progress toward your intermediate and long-term goals? For example, to make good progress toward tenure you might need to submit 2-3 proposals and start doing some useful committee work. If a family is in your plans then you and your spouse might need to start adding that third bedroom. Again, this is a list you can add to or refine later

4) Prioritize

Given the un-forgettable fact that we are faculty, and we are here to figure out how to manage our time and balance our lives as faculty, we will split up the priorities into work and life. Prioritize your long- and intermediate-range goals and objectives above (put a "1" next to the most important and a "2" next to the next most important and so on). Then, using the table provided on the next page, write down the day-to-day and weekly tasks that are the most important to achieve these goals and prioritize them. Don't expect it to be complete and obviously there are no wrong or right answers.

Examples: *Work:* writing proposals/papers; course development; class preparation; committee work; ensuring your students' progress; doing that Nobel-Prize winning research.

Life: son's baseball games on Tuesdays and Fridays; protected family time; exercise; card night; church; dances on Saturday; going out with the girls (or boys).

Life Priorities	Work Priorities

If your "life" and "work" priority lists are not somewhat even ask yourself whether you forgot to think about one or the other. If they are not even that's ok, too! It may be that 'balance' for you means longer hours at your job, or prioritizing family activities over being the top researcher in your field. If you are done early, then share some of your priorities with your neighbor. You may be reminded of some you didn't think of.

5) Adopt a Planning Strategy

Our next major task in managing time by controlling events is to develop, adopt, and implement a planning strategy. You have set long-term goals that are linked to your personal governing values and established priorities among the goals. You have set shorter-term and intermediate objectives to meet those long-term goals and prioritized daily and weekly task aimed to achieving them. The last step involves creating a daily and weekly plan that is based on your priorities and writing it down in a calendar. The key is to engage compulsively in the planning process, linked to your governing values, on an on-going basis.

Spend 5 minutes now filling in your second calendar based on your list of priorities. Don't forget to also put in your time for personal stuff like exercise, family time, date night, etc. Make sure you hit all the important tasks. There is no doubt that much of the rest of the time will fill with specific meetings etc. But as long as

you have planned your quality time for research, writing, your students, class and class preparation, self, family, the rest will fall into place.

Some Important Points to Remember:

1. Time for yourself and your personal life

It is important that personal time - self or family - does not get pushed aside because of the stresses of work deadlines. The idea of value-based time management is to ensure that you are meeting *all* your priorities and *all* your needs. Make time in your calendar every day for personal time. Plan that family vacation for this year, and those weekend camping trips - put them in your calendar and don't let them get pushed aside. Do the things you *want* to do, not the things you *think* you can do or that everyone else in the same position as you does.

As an example, my family lives out of town on 6 acres, we have horses, dogs, cats, chickens, and a veggie garden. We run, we hike, we camp, we take trips, we ski occasionally, we go to the professional baseball in Phoenix. We are *both* very active tenure faculty with active research programs and the need to take many business trips. We have two young children (about to turn 6 and 8). They play soccer and baseball, they swim, ride, and my daughter does ballet. We don't go to the movies or eat out at nice restaurants every week. We know no-one else like us, and our colleagues shake their heads in amazement at all we do, but it is what we want in our lives. *You can have what you want in your lives too.*

2. Recognize your time traps

In order to manage a work and life balance, we must make the most of the time set aside to accomplish our work tasks, because there is no doubt that they are numerous and we must accept compromise and perhaps a little less than perfection in our work - not mediocrity - but occasionally not perfection. As we consider the sequence of events that fill our present, we must ask ourselves, "What wastes our time now?" Stated another way, "What are our time-robbers?" Alec Mackenzie, in his book *The Time Trap*, presented a list of the twenty most common "time-robbers", based on survey data. Some of those include:

- Management by crisis
- Leaving tasks unfinished
- Socializing
- Inability to say "No"
- Incomplete information
- Telephone Interruptions
- Travel
- Attempting too much
- Drop-in visitors
- Lack of self-discipline
- Meetings
- Procrastination

A classic example is "email". Incoming email can distract us at all times of the day during periods we have set aside for specific tasks. Turn "email" off during these periods or set aside specific periods only to "check" email.

Another is the "pursuit of perfection", true for putting together class notes, and for writing papers/proposals. Give up on perfection - it is endless and unattainable - and is the cousin of "procrastination". Many fruitless hours are spent in the "pursuit of perfection".

One excellent strategy is to begin by identifying your own personal "time-robbers." You could use the list above as a starting point and tick those "time robbers" that you can relate to. Knowing what they are, you can then create your own strategies to defeat them, or, if help is needed, *The Time Trap* offers a number of problem-specific practical solutions.

3. Keep track of your time

Initially you may not be aware of the amount of time that is necessary to accomplish certain tasks. Keep track of the actual time spent writing and grading exams and homeworks, preparing class to a standard you are

comfortable with, and other similar tasks in a place separate from your weekly calendar. As you become more aware of the time needed for each task, adjust your calendar accordingly.

Final Points:

In summary, the steps in one approach to successful time management are as follows:

Recognize that you control your life by controlling your time and that you control your time by controlling the events and their sequence that make up time—make a commitment to control it.

1. Rid yourself of "time robbers."
2. Your governing values are the foundation of personal fulfillment, and you must know what they are.
3. When your daily activities reflect your governing values, you experience personal fulfillment, less frustration, and more energy. Set goals & objectives that reflect these values and prioritize them.
4. Daily planning is imperative, because it leverages time through focus. Keeping track of how you actually spend your time can make this much easier in the long run.
5. Reflect regularly (every 3 to 6 months) on how well your schedule is working: is there enough time set aside for the research you need to do?; is there enough scheduled time for grading those exams or are you eating into TV time to get it done?; does your schedule still properly reflect your priorities and do your stated priorities still reflect your goals? Remember, your goals and your objectives will change over the years as you progress through tenure, and as your life changes. Update your schedule to reflect these changes.

References:

MacKenzie, A. R., *The Time Trap*, published by AMACOM, American Management Association, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, pp.

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