

Tips About **TIME**



BY DON REYNOLDS

“My thoughts are running after birds’ eggs, play, and trifles, till I get vexed with myself. Mamma has a troublesome task to keep me studying. I own I am ashamed of myself. . . . I am determined this week to be more diligent.”

Such was the frustration expressed by a 9-year-old future president of the United States, John Adams (as related in John F. Kennedy’s *Profiles in Courage*). Young Adams, addressing his father, concluded: “I wish, sir, you would give me in writing some instructions with regard to the use of my time.”

Educators of the 1990s might not find themselves hunting birds’ eggs frequently, but they certainly can relate to John Adams’ turmoil in trying to manage time. It’s something like trying to manage the wind. Time is not a substance that is subject to our will. It comes our way every day, whether we ask for it or not.

Time is the dimension with which we live, move, and work. And all of us

have the same amount: 1,440 minutes every day. Unlike money, time can't be stored for future use. We cope with our crowded schedules one day at a time.

Getting Organized

Time is not the problem: it's how we use it that can cause problems. The effective use of time begins with self-management. If you can't organize yourself, you will be possessed by your watch, your calendar, or the people you are trying to serve. Mastering the art of getting things done in an organized manner must become a way of life for educators and pastors. Few people are born proficient in this art; we must learn it. Many of us never do.

What Really Counts?

It's not how much we do with our time that counts—it's how much we really get done. Our goal must be doing the right thing right and doing it right the first time. This involves prioritizing the things we do. Maybe it's what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote: "So be careful how you act. . . . Make the most of every opportunity you have for doing good" (Ephesians 5:15, 16, TLB).

Give Yourself a Checkup

Many of us are unaware of the many little ways we squander time. If you have questions about that, take a break from reading this article and do the 25-point checkup on page 15.

All done? Look over your answers. If there is a "no," review the subject and determine what you can do to correct the deficiency. The price of effectively managing ourselves is eternal vigilance, but the rewards are well worth it.

Getting Rid of Time Wasters

Time has an urgency attached to it. Jesus said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4). The great pioneer missionary Robert Moffatt felt this when he described time in relationship to winning people: "We shall have all eternity in which to celebrate our victories, but we have only one short hour before the sunset in which to win them."

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Sensing the lateness of the hour helps us make the best use of our time both inside and outside the classroom.

The Urgent Versus the Important

Balancing the urgent with the important is our ever-present concern. Generally speaking, the urgent has vital short-term consequences, but the important has long-term consequences. I think of Peter Drucker's observation: "More people are interested in doing things right than in doing the right things." Here's where efficiency and effectiveness come into play: The efficiency expert says, "Do the job right." The effectiveness expert says, "Do the right job right."

The grid below might help us.

Beginning in the lower left corner with quadrant A, the non-urgent and unimportant, we find people who are caught with the "shuffles." They don't

really know where to turn to escape the trifling minutia that demand attention.

Educational administrators and teachers often face such situations. Here we find the demands of the trivial, the unimportant, the inconsequential, the irrelevant. You know, the puny problems. Sometimes the junk mail.

Quadrant B boils down to the urgent but unimportant items. Someone did a survey on a leader's urgent telephone interruptions while in personal conference with someone else. The results: 70 percent of the telephone calls were less important than the issues involved in the personal conversation.

You've probably heard about the 80/20 rule. It's a general principle of life. Fund-raisers report that 80 percent of donations come from 20 percent of the people. And according to the 80/20 rule, we tend to spend 80 percent of our time on what produces just 20 percent of the results. Apparently we devote most of our time to that which may be urgent but often turns out to be unimportant.

As educators and administrators we must work toward turning this 80/20 ratio around. Let's spend our time on things that bring the greatest results.

Now back to our grid. Quadrant C

URGENT ----- NON-URGENT	URGENT BUT UNIMPORTANT B THE 80/20 LEADER	URGENT & IMPORTANT C THE CRISIS LEADER
	NON-URGENT & UNIMPORTANT A THE SHUFFLER	NON-URGENT BUT IMPORTANT D THE PLANNER
	UNIMPORTANT	----- IMPORTANT

calls for the urgent and the important. At first this may seem to be a good place to be operating. What's wrong with doing the important? Nothing. But if the important item is always in the urgent position, you've got a crisis.

There are times when crisis leadership is the way to go. If there is a fire in the house, that's urgent—and important. But who wants to be putting out fires every day? There is a better way to manage the work we do within the time frames we have.

This brings us to quadrant D, with its non-urgent but important elements. If you as teacher can truly deal with the important before the important becomes urgent, you are a winner! You will not only save time, but save the need to manufacture energy bursts that frustrate you and everybody around you.

Mastering the art of getting things done in an organized manner must become a way of life.

How do you get into this fourth quadrant? You organize and prioritize your life. Good planning won't rid you of all your hassles or "lightweights," but it will help you evaluate where you may be operating from in the many situations you face every day. If you spend most of your time on the

important rather than the urgent, you will accomplish much more than most other people—and thus save a whale of a lot of time.

Here are some hints that can help us make the best use of time:

1. Be industrious but not over-anxiously busy.

The Bible says "a relaxed attitude lengthens a man's life" (Proverbs 14:30, TLB). Solomon's analogy about ants has much to teach us on this point. They busily but calmly do whatever needs to get done.

2. Avoid spinning your wheels.

Be like Mary. Among all the things clamoring for attention, keep focused on what's most important.

3. Do it now if possible.

Postponing something that can be done immediately wastes time. For example, if a memo in your hands should be processed immediately but you set it aside for later action, that's inefficient as well as stress-producing.

4. Share your workload.

Many of you have readers or teacher aides. Some of you don't utilize them to their full potential. Then there are volunteers. We're really missing out on this score. This kind of help is available as never before—people are living longer and retiring earlier. We need to tap into this growing pool of talent.

5. Use your time twice.

During your travel time you can listen to audiocassette tapes. Or fill them with your own dictation—your creative thinking, planning ideas, or whatever.

6. Chart your energy cycle.

Some people are "morning people." They are ready to go when their feet hit the floor at 6:00 a.m. Others—well, don't talk to them for the first 30 minutes in the morning! They don't reach their peak of productivity until later in the day. Chart your own energy cycle and work accordingly.

7. Settle trifles quickly.

It's surprising how much time this can save. If it doesn't make any particular difference which way it goes, settle it quickly! Which route should we take? Little or no difference—settle it now!

8. Eliminate the things you shouldn't be doing.

Every teacher should ask these two vital questions: (1) What am I doing

that should not be done by me—or by anyone else? (What can I stop doing and no one will be affected or know the difference?) (2) What am I doing that should or could be done by someone else? *Delegate* is the one-word answer here. When you assign a task to someone else, also give that person enough authority to get the job done.

9. Develop foresight.

Insight is one thing; foresight is quite another. Foresight deals with the future, and the future demands planning. Little planning time means more work time. Adequate planning time means less work time. And the total time (work time and planning time) will be less when planning time is right.

The value of planning ahead is as valid as this text: “If your axe is dull and you don’t sharpen it, you will have to work harder to use it. It is smarter to plan ahead” (Ecclesiastes 10:10, TEV).

If you don’t do regular and effective long-range planning, you are not taking your job very seriously. When you do effective planning, you save time.

Slice it any way you choose and you will end up with these four key questions in almost any area of your teaching and administration:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How will we get there?
- How will we know we have arrived?

10. Schedule regular meetings.

This can save everybody’s time. Administrators, principals, head teachers, staff, and parents should know from month to month when meetings will convene. If you unexpectedly summon people, they have to adjust their schedules. That’s not always easy, and they don’t like it. Granted, some meetings can’t be anticipated. But for those that can—schedule them!

Furthermore, you don’t have to meet just because you are scheduled to. If there isn’t an agenda, cancel the meeting. No one will be too upset!

11. Plan for the unexpected.

In your daily schedule, program some time for the unavoidable, unexpected things that always happen. You will have fewer stress symptoms, and maybe even fewer ulcers.

12. Make a “to do” list.

Here’s a good habit to get into.

List what needs to be done for the day and for the week, and then prioritize—attack the major duties first. Ask yourself, “Which elephant will I go after today?” Then you won’t find yourself wasting time stomping the ants—those trivial details. Some people make a career of hunting ants instead of elephants. Why? They get a quicker kill, and thus a higher body count. But what a waste of that one precious resource we all have: our time!

Time is irreversible, irreplaceable, inelastic, and keeps on happening. All

of us have the same 60 minutes in an hour. The same 168 hours each week, the same 365 days each year. What makes us effective is getting organized and managing ourselves well. ❧

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Effectiveness Quiz

1. Do I have—in writing—a clearly defined set of lifetime goals? Yes__ No__
2. Do I have a similar set of goals for the next six months? Yes__ No__
3. Have I done anything today to move me closer to my lifetime goals? Yes__ No__
4. Do I have a clear idea of what I want to accomplish at work during the coming week? Yes__ No__
5. Do I tackle the most important tasks during my prime time? Yes__ No__
6. Do I concentrate on objectives instead of procedures, judging myself by accomplishment instead of by amount of activity? Yes__ No__
7. Do I set priorities according to importance, not urgency? Yes__ No__
8. Do I make constructive use of commuting time? Yes__ No__
9. Do I delegate as much work as possible? Yes__ No__
10. Do I delegate challenging jobs as well as routine ones? Yes__ No__
11. Do I delegate authority along with responsibility? Yes__ No__
12. Have I taken steps to prevent unneeded information and publications from reaching my desk and intruding on my time? Yes__ No__
13. When debating whether to file something, do I follow the principle “If in doubt, throw it out”? Yes__ No__
14. In meetings, do I try to crystallize what the issues are and summarize the decisions made and responsibilities assigned? Yes__ No__
15. Do I force myself to make minor decisions quickly? Yes__ No__
16. Am I on guard against the repetitive crisis, taking steps to make sure that it won’t occur again? Yes__ No__
17. Do I set deadlines for myself and others? Yes__ No__
18. Do I force myself to make time to plan? Yes__ No__
19. Have I discontinued any unprofitable activities recently? Yes__ No__
20. Do I keep in my pocket or briefcase things I can work on in spare moments? Yes__ No__
21. Do I live in the present, thinking in terms of what needs to be done now instead of rehashing the past or worrying about the future? Yes__ No__
22. Do I make periodic use of a time log to avoid backsliding into unproductive routines? Yes__ No__
23. Am I continually striving to establish habits that will make me more effective? Yes__ No__
24. Do I keep in mind the dollar value of my time? Yes__ No__
25. Am I really in control of my activities, or do circumstances and needless interruptions run my life? Yes__ No__