

*How to Manage Your Time**

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Time is the great equalizer. Whether you are smart or dumb, ugly or beautiful, you have the same 168 hours each week that everyone else has. How you spend that valuable commodity determines the quality of your life just as surely as if you walked into a department store and ordered it. Time is more precious than any possession.

You have probably already noticed that time passes more quickly for you than it once did. Those endless hours and days of childhood slip away by adolescence, and adulthood brings an ever increasing acceleration. Most college freshmen fall prey to the conviction that they have enough time to do everything, enough time to forgo planning. A dangerous self-deception. One of the purposes of college is to determine which people can control their time in order to meet their goals. Think about it. Most blue-collar or pink-collar jobs require employees to punch a time clock. The employer structures the time and the tasks. But college graduates who have professional jobs structure their own time and often the tasks as well. *A hidden requirement for success in college and in the professional world is the desire and the ability to use time wisely.* Such a skill is not instantly conferred on graduation, but it is slowly and painfully constructed throughout the college years.

Most students shudder at the thought of controlling their time; they envision a jail of schedules and charts that would not allow them to feel free. The irony of that prejudice is that good time management is a key--a key to achieving goals and enjoying life. The beginning is simple, a promise to yourself to be honest, and the first stage is the willingness to differentiate among fantasies, dreams, and goals.

I may fantasize that I am a rock star, adored by millions, or I may dream that upon graduation from college I will acquire a glamorous job with a large salary. This latter dream usually involves rewards but not the work itself. Fantasies and dreams are alike in that they are always effortless. No work, no struggle, but instantaneous. The magic of Hollywood. Fantasies are impossible; dreams are possible, but unlikely. Fantasies and dreams help us to escape. They serve no other purpose. Escape can be good entertainment, but goals are the markers on the road of accomplishment.

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Set Goals

Goals are those accomplishments that we deliberately set out to achieve. They may be small and simple: I'll do the dishes tonight. Or they may be large, complex, and long term: I want to enjoy my work and do it well, or I want to create a family based on love and respect. We may choose goals in every aspect of our lives: personal, social, academic, occupational, athletic, spiritual. A broad goal, such as good health, may spawn many smaller goals, such as maintaining a regular exercise schedule, eating a healthy diet, and getting regular medical checkups. Some goals are behaviors we want to decrease or increase or maintain.

New Year's resolutions -- those wild promises we make to ourselves after the indulgences of the holidays--are rarely kept, for we try to change too much too quickly. *The truth of the matter is that if we want to change a behavior permanently we usually have to change it slowly.* Changing a behavior requires some discipline, but not the amount most people imagine. The way to change a behavior slowly is to make a small promise to ourselves, keep it, and reward ourselves. A typical example would be a freshman who has decided to attend his 8 A.M. class the next day. He knows he needs to go to class to pass, so he promises himself that he will go to sleep by midnight. He sets the alarm for 7 A.M. and places it across the room. When it goes off, he reminds himself of his promise and why it is important. As he's getting ready, he compliments himself on his behavior and tells himself that going to class is important.

How we spend the minutes and hours of our days determines what we accomplish. Thinking about studying will not help our grades. Only studying does. Talking about our weight while we are eating pizza does not cause weight loss. Exercise and a sensible diet will control our weight. Those links from behaviors to accomplishments to goals are crucial. Do our behaviors and accomplishments lead us to our goals or away from them?

Most freshmen would like a satisfying collegiate experience that includes good grades and a social life that is fun and emotionally satisfying. They do not enjoy great amounts of stress. Students can often have other goals about work, family, sports. If your current behaviors will not lead you to your goals, try the following three steps for two weeks. This time management system is not a jail.

Write down three goals you want to accomplish this semester. You may want a 3.0, a date with the redhead in your math class, or a better relationship with your roommate. Your goal may be large or small. If your life seems out of control right now, write down one goal for this week. What will you have to do to accomplish that goal?

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Key Behavior

Isolate the key behaviors for your goals. Key academic behaviors include going to class, paying attention and

taking notes, reading the assignments when they are assigned, keeping an academic calendar with all tests noted. Key financial behaviors include writing down every check in the register (and keeping a running balance), planning a weekly budget, paying bills on time. Key personal behaviors include handling business details such as insurance and car inspections promptly, keeping your personal space neat, getting adequate sleep.

We lie to ourselves about key behaviors. They are often boring and mundane, and we want to delay them. Actually, we want someone else to do them. We want them to disappear. So we lie; we say that we will do it later, after the party or the movie. Tomorrow. Those lies usually result in late papers (lower grades), late payments (penalties), lower self-esteem. The more lies, the greater the amount of chaos.

Those lies are part of a larger behavior pattern called procrastination. We may procrastinate in just one area of our life such as studying or that pattern may permeate the entirety of our life. Procrastination occurs when we deliberately choose to delay or omit a behavior that we believe we should do. The reasons are legion. The most common cause of procrastination is our unwillingness to recognize and to pay the "price tag" for an outcome we say we want. An example would be that we want an A on the next history test, but the price tag is that we have to read and study the chapters (15 hours), attend class for those five weeks (15 hours), participate in a study group (10 hours), and study individually (8 hours). Forty-eight hours for one test! How much do we really want that A? And then there is no guarantee that we will make it; that 48 hours just gives us the opportunity to achieve that grade. Any goal can be subjected to that kind of scrutiny. Price tags are usually much higher than we want to admit. We always look for a bargain; witness the current spate of television ads about weight loss without effort or denial.

There are more serious causes of procrastination. We may be so overcommitted that exhaustion engulfs us. We may be so bound to the conviction that what we do should be perfect that we are afraid to start, for whatever we accomplish it will not be perfect. We may be rebellious, even to the extent of rebelling against ourselves and our own goals. We may be afraid to succeed because our families or significant others have told us we are failures and we believe them. We may feel more comfortable with failure than with success. We may be depressed emotionally and feel so "dragged out" that we cannot start any new behavior. We may be lazy and simply unwilling to work.

If procrastination is a characteristic of your life and you dislike the consequences of it, then take some time to reflect on why you do it. The suggestions that follow in this essay will help you overcome a mild case of procrastination, but if your behavior stems from serious causes and is engulfing your life, then seek professional help through your campus counseling center. Procrastination is a learned behavior; you can learn not to do it. You can learn to set your goals, plan your actions, and accomplish those actions in a timely manner.

If you want to change how you manage your own behaviors, then select a goal that is important to you. Write down the key behaviors for that goal. Which ones are you currently doing? Which key behavior would you like to change? Focus on it. What can you do to increase the likelihood you will do that behavior?

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Make a Plan

Make a plan to make that key behavior a habit. When a key behavior becomes a habit (a behavior we don't have to think about), we benefit. We are doing the right thing without a struggle.

Imagine a student in a freshman math class. She wants to make at least a B and realizes that a key behavior is completing the homework problems on time. Her class is Tuesday--Thursday, and she often does her homework late on Monday and Wednesday evenings. By that time, she has forgotten what went on in class, and the problems seem overwhelmingly difficult. Two key behaviors for her goal would be to do the homework as soon as it is assigned and then review it before class. Her plan to make those behaviors habits is simple: On Tuesdays and Thursdays after history, she walks to the library and picks a quiet place to study. (She has set the video cassette recorder to record her favorite soap.) It has only been two hours since the math class, so she still remembers what went on in class. She starts working on the homework problems. If she gets confused or stuck, she takes a short break and then attempts the problem again. If she still cannot do it, she leaves it and attempts other problems. After working on several others, she again attempts the confusing one(s). If she's successful, she completes her work and goes home. If there are unsolved problems, she goes to one of the campus learning labs and requests help. Several days later, she takes thirty minutes before math class to look over the problems and quickly work one or two. She's ready for class. After two weeks, it's automatic for her to go to the library after history class. The habit is in place.

Two habits that can transform the quality of your life are simple and powerful. *When something needs to be done, DO IT.* Do it right away. Don't put it off. You will just think about it and feel guilty. The longer you delay, the guiltier you will feel. Whether it is getting out of bed and getting cleaned up or picking up the trash or reading the chapter--just do it.

Give yourself ten minutes. If you get up ten minutes earlier in the morning, you won't have to rush. If you leave for class or an appointment ten minutes earlier, you arrive on time, regardless of traffic or parking. That extra ten minutes reduces stress, and it also reduces the likelihood that you will make a mistake because you are hurrying. That extra ten minutes adds quality to your life.

Being a successful college student is a full-time job. Treat it like a job. If you are going to miss a class, call your professor in advance, just as you would an employer. If you have an assignment, do it; that assignment is your work, as is learning in class. Tests and papers are how you demonstrate whether you have been doing your job. Your professors are your supervisors. They evaluate your performance, and your performance record is your academic transcript. *Your transcript reflects your cumulative performance and is an accurate indicator of how well you have mastered the use of time.* When you master time, then you are a professional.

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Exercise



Exercise: Controlling Procrastination

Check off the areas where you tend to procrastinate:

Household

- daily chores (dishes, laundry)
- small repairs and home projects
- large home projects
- yard care and gardening
- phoning a repair service
- returning merchandise
- paying bills
- shopping for groceries
- running errands for others
- other _____

Work

- being on time
- being on time for appointments
- making calls
- decision making
- paperwork
- reports
- confronting someone in regard to a problem
- paying a compliment
- implementing new ideas
- billing
- requesting a raise or promotion
- arranging a meeting with your supervisor
- reading current literature
- looking for a new job
- plotting a direction for your career
- other _____

School

- going to classes
- doing daily assignments
- doing required reading
- studying for exams
- writing term papers
- having a conference with a professor
- applying to graduate or professional school
- registering
- paying tuition and fees
- attending to degree requirements
- returning books to library
- inquiring about classes for next term
- other _____

Social Relationships

- phoning friends
- calling on friends
- corresponding
- inviting friends to your home
- calling writing relatives
- visiting relatives
- asking someone out
- planning recreational or social activities with others
- expressing appreciation
- sending thank-you notes
- sending cards or gifts
- having parties
- being on time for recreational or social activities
- asking for help
- confronting a friend with regard to a problem
- ending a stagnant relationship

_____ other _____

Finances

- _____ filing income tax forms on time
- _____ organizing bills, receipts
- _____ keeping tax records
- _____ consulting with an accountant
- _____ budgeting
- _____ phoning the bank about discrepancies
- _____ paying fines
- _____ paying back loans
- _____ collecting money from debtors
- _____ paying car insurance
- _____ balancing checkbook
- _____ paying bills
- _____ other _____