



CHALLENGE



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A Herff Jones IMPACT Resource for Students

Work Smarter, Not Harder

There's a story of a woodsman who worked day after day chopping down trees. One day he was grumbling to a friend that it seemed like he was working harder and harder and getting less and less done. The friend asked when was the last time he sharpened his ax, and the woodsman replied, "I don't have time to stop and sharpen my ax!"

If you find yourself feeling like the woodsman—going from one task to another and never seeming to make a dent in your list of things to do—it might be well to remember the old adage "a stitch in time saves nine." Taking a bit of time to organize your life to manage responsibilities better could prevent many hassles and considerably reduce your stress. Consider implementing the following time management tips.

■ **Have to's vs. Want to's.**

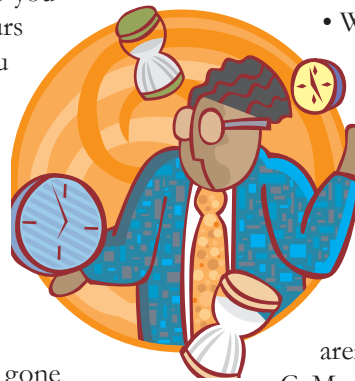
Consider all the things that take time in your life. Make a list of all the things you **HAVE** to get done, and the things you **WANT** to get done. The **Have to's** usually include such things as family responsibilities, school work, sleep, eating, and personal hygiene. The **Want to's** can include such things as student activities, recreation, keeping in touch with friends, watching television, physical activity (although some might place this in the **Have To** category).

■ **Budget your time.** You can't save time or store it up—like it or not, you only have 24 hours in a day. How much time can you spend on each thing you need or want to do? List everything that needs to be done in a typical day and how much time each will take. For example, if you sleep for 8 hours and it takes you half an hour to shower and get dressed for school, then half an hour on the bus to get to school, there's 9 hours gone from your 24. If all that needs to be done adds up to more than 24, something has to go or be cut back.

■ **Keep a list.** Take a few minutes each day to make a master list of all the things you have to do that day—day planners are great for this, but a sheet of paper works fine. Putting things down on paper means you don't have to waste energy trying to remember them and frees your mind for more creative work.

■ **Prioritize your list.** No matter how carefully you plan, there will always be times when things on your to-do list are in conflict. How do you determine which should take priority? Ask yourself:

- Which is more important in the scheme of life?
- Which has a more urgent deadline?
- What would happen if you didn't do it?
- Is this a now or never opportunity?
- What is the best use of my time right now?



A simple system to use is to mark the things that must be done with an **A**, things that should be done with a **B**, and things that would be nice to do but aren't very important with a **C**. Many people informally do this, just by the order in which they tackle the jobs on their list. However, be careful not to waste all your time completing the **C** items and then find that the important things are undone at the end of the day.

■ **Figure out what times you want to set aside** for **Have to's** and what time you have for **Want to's**. Remember that all work and no play will wear you out, so be sure to save some time for relaxing and taking care of the **Want to's** on your list.

■ **Cross out or check off what you have done.** Most people receive a certain amount of satisfaction from checking things off their lists. It helps reinforce

the feeling that you are getting things accomplished. Some people even add things they've already done to their lists, just for the pleasure of crossing them off!

■ **Break up large projects or tasks into smaller, easily accomplished parts.** Set mini-deadlines for yourself by which to accomplish each of the smaller tasks. This way, you won't find yourself trying to cram it all in at once right before the deadline.

■ **Be realistic about the time needed to accomplish tasks.** Review each project to estimate how long it will take to complete, then add a bit more time to be safe. Block off time on your daily schedule for each item. You might be able to get your English essay written in two hours so you think you'll leave it to the night before it's due. But will you be able to do that when you also need to spend an hour on your algebra homework and an hour finishing a history project that's due?

■ **Allow some flexible time for crises and interruptions.** Inevitably, when you have every minute of your day scheduled, something will happen to throw a wrench into things. Try to allow some wiggle room for getting things done.

■ **Fight procrastination.** Do it now if it's important. Difficult or unpleasant tasks won't be any easier if you put them off.

■ **Avoid distractions.** If you find yourself being interrupted frequently, turn off your phone and go someplace that you don't normally go. People can't interrupt you if they can't find you.

■ **Learn to say no.** If you find this difficult to do when people ask you to do something, say "let me think about it for a while," or "let me check my schedule and get back to you." This gives you a little time to decide if you really want to do it or have the time to do it.

■ **Avoid over-commitment.** Be realistic about what you can do in the time you have. It doesn't do you or anyone else any good to take on something that you don't have time to do. You'll be stressed, others will

It is not enough to be busy; so are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?

Henry David Thoreau

be frustrated with you, and your reputation will suffer.

■ **Know when to ask for help.** Admitting that we've taken on too much or are feeling overwhelmed can be difficult, but there's no need to suffer alone. Learn how to delegate things that can be delegated. Ask family or friends to help out when your load gets too heavy.

Next time you find yourself saying "I wish I had more time..." let that be a signal to you to stop and evaluate how effectively you are using the time you have. Like the woodsman, you may find it worthwhile to stop and sharpen your ax.

Stress Busters

If you find your best efforts at time management have still left you feeling stressed, try some of these stress busters.

- Learn a few new jokes and share them.
- Hang out with positive people.
- Do something physical—go skating, bowling, biking, dancing, or play raquetball.
- Take a hike in the woods with a friend.
- Pamper yourself with a manicure, pedicure, massage, or a new haircut.
- Perform a random act of kindness.
- Go play on the playground with some little kids.
- Reminisce with some old scrapbooks or photos.
- Read a novel just for fun.
- Listen to your favorite CD.
- Don't sweat the small stuff.
- Get some sleep!



The DifferenceMaker Calendar/Planner: A Pro-Active Life Planner for Student Leaders. Contact your local Herff Jones Professionals for details.