

LEA: Colleague to Colleague

Issue # 3 A Communication to and for Our Newer Members



January is always a tough month for teachers. The holiday breaks are gone, but some students still appear to be on a 24/7 “sugar high.” There is the need to finalize all sorts of curricular matters and grading for first semester and get geared up for second semester. Grades are due. Ordering supplies for next year is fast becoming a reality and an additional burden. For some sites, parent-teacher conferences are just around the bend. The weather can add to the unpleasantness of the month. There never seems to be enough time to get everything done.

Here are some tips that might help you manage your time. *We hope you can find the time to read this article* and hope it will give you some helpful ideas!

No Spare Time? Polish Up Your Time Management Skills!

Revised from an article by Staci Suits, school psychologist, Clay County, Florida

Time management is finding what works for you

In the twenty-first century, we often feel pulled in too many directions, both personally and professionally. We feel like we're on a treadmill. We feel tired. We don't have time to relax. We're always in a rush, yet we feel that we accomplish very little. This problem is especially prevalent with educators, who are faced with more and more demands on their time, with the disastrous result of burnout and numerous people leaving the profession.

If you feel that you have no spare time for enjoying yourself, you may need to hone your time management skills.

Improving the Quality of Your Time

Four simple techniques can improve the quality of your time: pacing, assessing your workload, delegating tasks, and multi-tasking.

Pacing. Pacing simply means monitoring and adjusting your work speed and stress levels for optimal performance. You can assess your work speed by determining the time of day you have the most energy. Perhaps you are a "morning person," or a "night owl."

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For peak performance, do more difficult jobs at your most energetic times. Conversely, do routine or mundane tasks during periods of lower energy. If you work best in the morning, use that time to tackle the tasks that require the most focus, such as grading writing assignments, conducting in-depth parent conferences, and making changes to a child's individualized behavior plan. Use the afternoons for tasks that are less challenging, such as grading basic math assignments, reviewing cumulative folders, writing memos, inputting grades in the computer, and making routine phone calls.

The number and quality of breaks you take also affects your energy level. When you are exhausted or overworked, you are more likely to make mistakes or get frustrated, which costs more time in the long run. Relaxing periodically to prevent burnout is a good use of time if it is done appropriately. Although teachers have less control over their schedules than most professionals, *we can maximize the flexible times we are given, such as using our lunch times to enjoy ourselves and relax.*

If your class goes to resource and you typically use that time to grade papers or do other work, set aside five minutes of that time to sit quietly, stretch, or laugh with a colleague. Keep inspirational or humorous materials, such as those found in daily calendars, to look at when you have a minute during class -- it may just give you the boost you need to keep going!

Assessing your workload. You may have to modify unrealistic expectations of yourself in order to achieve a balance of adequate work-leisure time. *No one person can do it all.* Many teachers think that asking for help or admitting to stress is a sign of weakness. But, talking with others may lead to ways of sharing tasks and getting help. It may help you realize when your expectations of what you *should* be doing are unreasonable, which may help you let go of some of tasks.

You can also share tasks with co-workers. For instance, ask another teacher to make you extra copies when they are at the machine and agree to organize the materials for both of you, which will save you both time. Having another teacher as an ally can be helpful, even if it means just having someone to encourage you during those tough days.

Delegating tasks. Delegating less important tasks -- or dropping them -- can be beneficial. Giving up control of some of the more routine activities we do as educators may save us time to focus on the more important tasks or those that only we can do.

Most teachers already have students and volunteers help organize, collect, and grade papers. These same helpers can change bulletin boards, file papers, make copies, design materials for projects, fill out non-confidential paperwork such as field trip forms, and even come up with ideas for test questions. We can't drop some activities, but we might be able to make some simple changes to allow more time for other things. For instance, do just one bulletin board and use pre-made posters elsewhere or use only the last name and first initial in the grade books rather than writing the full first name.

Multi-tasking. Most teachers are already pros at doing two things at once -- it should be part of the job requirements! Use this to your advantage, if it is something you find easy and helpful. We can't drop those required meetings (even if we'd like to sometimes), but we can use that time more productively. Grading papers while waiting for the speaker to start or making lists of tasks during

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transitions in the program may be helpful. However, if you find this more stressful or this doesn't work for you, don't do it. Some experts advise against multi-tasking because some people take on too many activities at once. If this is you, force yourself to prioritize or don't multi-task!

Time management is finding what works for you, which may be different from what works for your co-workers.

Increasing the Amount and Quality of Your Time

Some simple behavior changes may increase the amount and quality of time you have: better use of waiting time, reducing the number of distractions and interruptions, and engaging in healthier behaviors.

Better use of waiting time. Use waiting time more effectively by bringing reading materials or completing tasks while waiting in line, waiting for appointments, or while on hold on the telephone.

Reducing the number of distractions and interruptions. To increase your productivity, reduce the number of distractions and interruptions. For instance, you could limit yourself to no more than fifteen minutes of casual talk at work per day outside of your lunchtime. By being more organized and stingy with your time, you create more time for other preferred activities.

Engaging in healthier behaviors. Many behaviors, such as the times and amounts you eat and drink, the quality of your diet and your lifestyle, also affect your ability to use time efficiently. Most medical professionals agree that for optimal performance, we all need to decrease caffeine, exercise regularly, eat a well-balanced diet, and get enough sleep.

Simply reducing television viewing by an hour a day (or even cutting it out altogether) can give you more time to enrich yourself, relax, or engage in healthier behaviors such as exercise or yoga.

Although most Americans know the behaviors that would lead to improved physical health, many of us do not follow them because of "lack of time." Developing time management skills is a good first step to solving this problem. By using good time management skills, you can increase productivity, decrease stress, and ultimately, lead a healthier, better life.



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