

Well-being this Week

FOR EDUCATORS • BY EDUCATORS

Where'd the time go?

Tips for improving time management to decrease stress

by Lisa Sanetti, PhD

Recent editions included opportunities to (1) understand what your stressors are (i.e., activating events) and (2) identify your thoughts and perceptions related to your stressors (i.e., beliefs), and (c) identify your pattern of negative emotions after stressors, and (d) identify your values.

"I'm always in a rush!"

"There's never enough time to do my work."

"There aren't enough hours in the day."

Do you find yourself saying or thinking these types of things?
If so, you are NOT alone.



Lack of time to complete work is consistently noted by educators as a top stressor.

Time is one of the few resources you can't replenish.



Understanding how you use your time and how those activities align with your values will help you craft a less-stressful, richer, fuller, more meaningful life.

STEP 1: Learning how you really spend your time

FACT: People are terrible at judging time.

When planning how to use their time, people tend to think tasks will take about 30% of the time they actually take.

When reflecting on how long they spent on tasks, people tend to overestimate how long they spent on less-preferred tasks and underestimate how long they spent on preferred tasks.

For a few days to a week, complete a time log. On this log, note:

- **TASK DURATION:** As noted above, humans are generally not great at estimating how long tasks take. Recording the duration of tasks you complete will help you to increase the accuracy of your estimates in the future!
- **STRESS LEVEL:** Our stress levels vary throughout the day. Understanding what tasks activate your stress response will help you reflect on your activating events, beliefs (thoughts & perceptions) about those events, and consequences.
- **VALUES ALIGNMENT:** When we are super busy, we tend not to think about whether we are spending our time doing tasks aligned with our values. Reflecting on how tasks are (or are not) aligned with our values, helps us to reframe those tasks as important and meaningful instead of stressful.
- **IMPORTANCE / URGENCY:** Too often, we engage in tasks that we perceive as urgent, in place of those we know are important. This results in working on important tasks after we are already exhausted from dealing with the "urgent" all day. Reflecting on importance and urgency can help us prioritize: important, urgent tasks (do it); important, not urgent tasks (schedule it); urgent, not important tasks (delegate it); and not urgent, not important (delete it).

You can print the sample time log below, make your own, or use a copy of a Google Sheet version online via the QR code.



STEP 3: Getting organized

Now that you have considered patterns in how you spend your time, here are some simple tools & techniques that may help you save time. We have all heard of (and likely used) many tools and techniques to improve time management. The focus here is on simple ways to maximize your effectiveness.

- Write EVERYTHING down. On ONE to do list. (Then your brain doesn't have to remember it).
- What gets scheduled, gets done.
 - Enter every meeting, due date, appointment, etc.
 - Enter each task you want to complete in a week on your calendar. Match the timing of tasks with your energy levels (Are you a morning person? Night owl?) and expected duration (remember it's likely to take longer than you think!)
- Have your to-do list and your calendar with you at all times.
 - Consider if it is helpful to be able to email tasks to your list - this option is available in many on-line to do apps.
- If you don't get to a task, move it to another day. Note what took up that time-was it important? Urgent? A time waster?
- Create rituals! Do habitual, routine tasks at the same time each day or day of the week. (e.g., Answer emails for a specific, scheduled time 2-3 times a day or every # hours)
- Take a break to increase productivity! Have a random 5 min? Do something values aligned but not work related. Value close relationships? Email or text a friend or colleague. Value physical fitness? Take a quick walk around the school.
- Procrastinating on unpleasant tasks? Pair them with a preferred tasks (e.g., listening to favorite music or podcast) or rewards (e.g., chocolate).
- Be systematic & create efficiencies!
 - Is there an email you send every year or every semester/quarter? Write it once and save to a file for a quick copy and paste next time.
 - Can you divide and conquer routine tasks with colleagues? Do it!

STEP 4: Weekly changes

Change is hard. Consider trying just one change at a time.

Dates:

Change for the week:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
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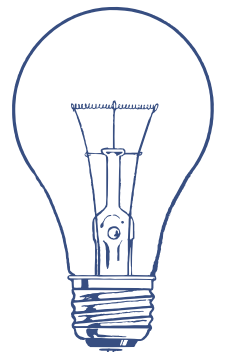
Well-being this Week Take-Aways



Time is limited; tasks seem endless. It's important to use your time wisely not mindlessly. Logging and reflecting on how you spend your time can help you identify ways to use your time on important, values aligned tasks.



When you spend time on important, values-aligned tasks, your time will feel less-stressed and more meaningful, even when there are a LOT of tasks.



Well-being work isn't selfish. It's necessary.