

Pastoral Time Management



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Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16, NRSV). Paul said to the Christians in Colossae: "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time" (Colossians 4:5, NRSV).

Jesus said, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded" (Luke 12:48, NRSV). God gives us enough time to do whatever we are expected to do. We are told to use our time wisely so that the things of most importance get done. When that happens, God will be pleased with our lives.

Quiz

Here's a brief quiz to help you think about your time-management skills. Mark the following statements true or false for you. The more you answer with "false," the more your time-management skills need a tune-up.

1. T/F My sermon is always substantially finished before Saturday.
2. T/F I am rarely, if ever, late for meetings.
3. T/F I visit members, those in nursing homes and those who are homebound, on a regular schedule.
4. T/F I take my day off weekly, except for genuine emergencies.
5. T/F I have a regular daily time for devotion and prayer.
6. T/F I attend the BPMC meetings at least 3 of 4 weeks per month.
7. T/F I think that I spend most of my time on the most important things.
8. T/F I'm confident that I visit hospital patients often enough during their stay.
9. T/F I almost always attend my children's or grandchildren's school and sports events.
10. T/F I take at least two weeks' for renewal every year.
11. T/F I seem to have enough time for myself.
12. T/F My sermons are usually planned several weeks in advance.
13. T/F I sleep eight hours a night.
14. T/F I exercise half an hour or more several days a week.
15. T/F My spouse and I set aside time to be with each other.
16. T/F Church people feel that I'm accessible.
17. T/F I am home four or more evenings per week.
18. T/F My desk top is cleaned regularly.
19. T/F I list the tasks I hope to accomplish each day.
20. T/F I try never to do things someone else could do just as well.

Time management is not an exact science. Nor is it the same for each person. But good time management can make the difference between a successful, fulfilling ministry, and one that seems to splash about aimlessly in the shallows. Most important, time management is a skill that can be learned, and learning it is worth the time!

For many of us, the most serious challenge in competent time management is neither finding a block of time to take a sabbatical nor making the effort to create a healthy daily schedule on paper. The most serious challenge is adhering to the schedule we say we have.

One of the most interesting things about time management is whether you manage your schedule or whether you schedule your priorities. You will be most successful in achieving your pastoral goals if you schedule your priorities according to the system described next.

TIME BLOCK APPROACH

One approach to time management suggests managing the time blocks in your week. Think of the week as pastoral care expert Wayne Oates does in *The Minister's Own Mental Health*. Oates divides the week into 21 periods--morning, afternoon, and evening for each of the seven days. In a typical 9-to-5, 40-hour job, work would consume 10 of the 21 periods. Acknowledging that pastors often work when others don't, Oates suggests that the rule of thumb for a pastor's normal week would be to work no more than 13 of the 21 periods. If circumstances require you to work 15 of the 21 units in a given week, why not take off an extra two units the next week to keep your average at 13? Approaching your work week with this kind of sliding scale both allows the necessary flexibility to deal with situations as they arise and keeps in mind the goal of adequate rest, recreation, and time with family and friends.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wed	Thurs	Friday	Sat
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

URGENCY - IMPORTANCE MATRIX

The very nature of pastoral life works against keeping a schedule. The phone is always ringing. Someone is dropping in. Sudden crises or opportunities can interrupt the day. It's frighteningly easy to get to the end of a day without having accomplished anything you intended to do.

Even with the best of management, of course, a day or a week will often get away from you. There's no way to plan for the week when three homebound seniors die within 36 hours.

Setting priorities is the key. The Scriptures encourage us to bring our first fruits to God, because if we don't pay our tithe up front we will find all kinds of other ways to spend our money. Setting priorities means doing the important things first. As with money, if we don't do the important things first, they may not get done. We will find other things to do.

What are we likely to do first? The tasks we are best at doing or the stuff we like to do most. Usually that means we do the easiest tasks first. It takes a lot of discipline to do the most important work first. The demon of laziness tugs at all our hearts.

Creating a weekly schedule that sets priorities for your time will enhance your effectiveness *and* allow you to live a more relaxed life.

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<p>Q1 – Urgent & Important</p> <p>“The Quadrant of Necessity”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises (Emergency Hospital visits) • Pressing problems • Member or staff phone calls • Deadline-driven projects 	<p>Q2 – Not Urgent but Important</p> <p>“The Quadrant of Productivity”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation, Planning & Prevention • Daily Devotion & Sermon preparation • Exercise • Family Time
<p>Q3 – Urgent but Not Important</p> <p>“The Quadrant of Deception”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needless interruptions • Other people’s minor issues • Some Phone calls, E-mail messages & drop-in visitors 	<p>Q4 – Not Urgent & Not Important</p> <p>“The Quadrant of Waste”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irrelevant phone calls • Computer games • Junk mail

Schedule time in Q2, first!

IMPORTANCE

The Action Lists Approach

We're all familiar with the "to do list" approach. One author suggests developing what he calls "Next Action" Lists. Possible lists include the following:

- Agendas
- Anywhere
- Call
- Computer
- Errands
- Home
- Office
- Prayer
- Reading
- Waiting For
- Borrowing
- Lent Out
- Projects
- Someday/Maybe

Getting Things Done

The core of Getting Things Done is establishing a workflow. How do you deal with everything you need to do (or think about or plan)? Unfortunately, many of us are trying to make it up on the fly. Someone hands me a piece of paper. What do I do with it? - pocket, notebook, drawer, desk, backpack, file, trash? A church member wants me to send him that article about fasting. Do I think I'll just remember to do it? Do I make a note to myself? What do I do with that note?

The Getting Things Done workflow on the next page will provide some ideas on how to deal with everything in your inbox. If you follow its recommendations, you will learn to process and organize all of the stuff comes across your desk.

Add page 3 of GID Planner here

Systematic time management requires that we find the nonproductive, time-wasting activities and get rid of them by asking a number of diagnostic questions:

- Ask yourself first: "What would happen if this were *not* done at all?" If the answer is, "Nothing," stop doing it. It is amazing how many things busy pastors do that would never be missed.
- The next question is: "Which of the activities in my time log could be done by somebody else just as well, if not better?" Delegation does not mean turning something over to somebody else. That's not delegation; that's abdication. In order to delegate, we decide, "What is the job? What are the objectives? What are the minimal standards? What are the needed results?" Then we seek someone else to do it. That's managing.
- The third question is: "Am I wasting my staff members' time?" There is a simple way to discover if this indeed is occurring: ask other people. Effective pastors ask systematically and without coyness, "What do I do that wastes your time without contributing to your effectiveness?" To ask this question—without being afraid of the truth—is a mark of an effective pastor.
- The fourth question is: "Which time-wasters result from a lack of a system and which from a lack of foresight?" The symptom to look for is the recurrent *crisis*, the crisis that comes back year after year. A crisis that recurs a second time is a crisis that must not occur again.

A recurrent crisis should always be foreseen. It can therefore either be prevented or dealt with by a routine that staff members or other church workers can manage. The definition of a *routine* is that it makes unskilled people without judgment capable of doing what it took near-genius to do before; for a routine puts down in systematic step-by-step form what an able person learned in surmounting yesterday's crisis. The recurrent crisis is typically a symptom of laziness.

- The fifth question is: "Am I attending an excess of meetings?" Meetings are by definition a concession to deficient organization, for one either meets or one works. One cannot do both at the same time. In an ideally designed structure (which in a changing world is, of course, only a dream) there would be no meetings. Everybody would already know what he or she needs to know to do the job. We meet because people holding different jobs have to cooperate to accomplish tasks. There will always be more than enough meetings. But if pastors in an organization spend more than a fairly small part of their time in meetings, it is a sure sign of disorganization.

Many pastors know about these unproductive and unnecessary time demands, yet they hesitate to prune them, fearing they may cut out something important by mistake. But this mistake, if made, can be speedily corrected. If one prunes too harshly, one usually finds out soon enough.