



Making time



Editor's note: This is the first article in the 2010 Ewing Professional Development Series. STMA and Ewing have again partnered to bring sports turf industry professional development and career issues to the forefront. For more information see www.STMA.org.

Most of us have felt swamped at one time or another. With hectic work schedules, family responsibilities, and social engagements, there just doesn't seem to be enough time for everything we need and want to do. Although life will always provide us with its little twists and turns, once we learn to manage our time wisely, much of the day-to-day chaos in our lives can be reduced or even eliminated.

The first step in learning how to manage your time is to develop a general work schedule. Your work schedule should include time for yourself as well as time for the maintenance of your business or duties at work. After you've defined the major elements of your workload, the next step is to prioritize them by identifying critical deadlines, routine maintenance items, and fun/relaxation time. Answering questions like "How much time do I have to make this decision, finish this task, or contact this person?" will help you to start identifying what needs to be done immediately versus what can wait. Setting priorities depends on deadlines, how many people you must call to get the information you need, and whether you can delegate or get assistance from others. If you are involved in group projects, reserve additional time for communication and problem-solving.

Once you have identified your priorities, look at all of your options for achieving them. Evaluate and move forward with the ones you feel are the most useful for you. The only time to consider changing approaches mid-task is when you know the change will save time. If you are in doubt, it is usually best to consider in the direction you started. By setting up your work schedule and identifying your priorities, you have already started down the road to more effective time management. Other time management suggestions you may find useful for managing both your business life as well as your personal life include the following:

- Contract out tasks. Contract out tasks you do not have the expertise to complete. Your client will appreciate your honesty and effort to get the best result.
- Start with the most worrisome task. Start the morning, afternoon, or evening with the most worrisome task before you. This will reduce your anxiety level for the next task.
- Complete deadline work early. Not only will this reduce stress and lighten your work schedule, but it will also give you more self-confidence about managing your schedule.
- Know your capacity for stress. When you are hitting overload, take the break you need (even if it is a short one) when you need it.
- Stay organized. Take time at the end of each day to briefly organize your desk and make reminder lists of tasks for the next day or week.
- Take advantage of down time. Allow yourself some down time between busy periods to review your schedule and reevaluate your priorities.
- Get physical. Physical exertion such as walking, bicycling, swimming, or organized sports activities helps to discharge stress. Stretching, yoga, jumping rope, sit-ups, playing with children, or doing yard work are other types of therapeutic breaks you should consider during times of stress.
- Have fun. Be sure to have some fun while working or playing; a good sense of humor can keep most problems in perspective.
- Divide up your time. Decide how much time to spend on business development, personal needs, volunteerism, and family. Start by allowing 25 percent of your time for yourself. Each time you make a commitment, set a timeline for your involvement. Remember that maintenance takes at least 25 percent of the time you spend on any project whether it's business, marriage, or serving on the board of a non-profit organization.
- Build flexibility into your schedule. Your availability to family and friends depends on the flexibility you build into your schedule.

Female business owners frequently have the primary responsibility for making sure family members are cared for when they are dependent or ill, so it's necessary to leave some time in your schedule for emergencies or to have good backup resources. Get to know your neighbors so you know who to call on for help in times of crisis.

GOALS ARE GOOD

In the bigger picture, consider the relationship between your business life and your personal life. Be as realistic as possible when answering the following questions, keeping in mind what is most important to you:

- What are your long term goals? Your partner's goals?
- Where are the conflicts and where are the similarities in those goals?
- What is it that you really want to do? List all possible ways to accomplish this.
- How long will it take you to reach your goal?
- How do your timeline and goals affect your family (parents, siblings, partner, children)?
- How do your personal goals conflict with or match your business goals?
- How much time can you donate to community programs?
- Have you talked about your personal goals with your business partner or employer?
- Have you talked about your business goals with your personal partner?

Don't underestimate the toll that emotional stress takes on your physical health and your ability to concentrate on your work or enjoy time with your family. Make sure you have time for the important people and events in your life. ■

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