

**Moving Activity to Productivity - Approaches to Goal Setting, Time-Management, and Rituals to Support Faculty Success**

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# **Moving Activity to Productivity - Approaches to Goal Setting, Time-Management, and Rituals to Support Faculty Success**

## **Introduction/Need for Idea**

Balancing the multi-faceted responsibilities common to a career in higher education is a practice requiring effort, mentorship, and even professional development in order to master (Perlmutter, 2010). While the roles of teacher, scholar, and public servant are prioritized differently by individuals (Knobloch, 2010), every faculty member must also contend with expectations and responsibilities associated with life outside of work (Matheson & Rosen, 2012; Perlmutter, 2010). Previous research has found a sense of imbalance between personal and professional responsibilities among professors (Matheson & Rosen, 2012). Faculty are at risk of suffering from that lack of imbalance almost immediately; “over and over you see the strains, stresses, and fractures in partnership and marriages as the workloads and expectations for tenure for new faculty (and worries about not getting tenure) rise even higher” (Perlmutter, 2010, p. 125).

The challenge to maximize productivity at work and balance that work with a healthy home life is real, and both attrition data and published research provide evidence of the struggle among faculty members (Mukhtar, 2012; Murphrey, et al., 2016; Philipsen, & Bostic, 2010). However, the amount of information available to assist with time management is infinite and finding a system that works for a specific individual can be as paralyzing as the overwhelming to-do list.

One year ago, we (four faculty from four different institutions) formed an accountability team to explore options enabling us to be more efficient, reduce the amount of time spent on non-meaningful tasks, and accomplish desired academic and personal goals. The purpose of this innovate poster presentation is to share the authors’ experiences and decision-making process to identify a time management system that it manageable and effective.

## **How it Works**

While conventional wisdom challenges us to go digital, research suggests that memory retention is improved with handwriting (Bui, Myerson, & Hale, 2013; Mueller, & Oppenheimer, 2014; Smoker, Murphy, & Rockwell, (2009). Three of us adopted the Full Focus Planner (FFP) (Michael Hyatt and Company, 2019). One of us, after experimenting with the FFP, elected to modify a Microsoft Word template that was downloadable, printed and included in a Disc/Arc – based planner. While the planners may differ, the basic time management/energy management principles are the same. There are six key planning principles in each system: (a) setting annual goals, (b) using a digital monthly calendar to record important events, (c) creating an ideal work week schedule, (d) daily planning of Big 3 goals, tasks, and task time allotment, (e) daily ritual planning and tracking, and (f) weekly and quarterly review and preview planning.

## **Results to Date**

To date, our team has maintained this hybrid planning system for one year and engaged in dialogue around the effectiveness of the systems we have chosen. Each of us have found that the commitment to the six steps has led to the achievement of the goals that mattered and were planned for. In an academic setting, we were able to achieve productivity, not just activity. We have made the following conclusions:

- The use of an electronic to-do list to keep track of long-term projects and manage ideas is most effective. Using a paper planner for day-to-day planning, while maintaining an electronic calendar, best blends personal goal achievement and time management.
- Each of us has found great value in “organizing tomorrow today” (Selk & Bartow, 2015), spending five minutes each day to organize tomorrow’s to-do list. We found this five-minute task is most effective when completed at a time other than at the end of the day, as the final five minutes in a work day tended to be rushed and focused more on upcoming tasks at home. We found that by dedicating five minutes to organizing tomorrow today, we were able to subconsciously begin the mental work of these tasks before the next day, better preparing us to take immediate action on those items once at work.
- Daily identification of the “big three” – the three most important things that must be done tomorrow - was helpful in maintaining balance between work and home. Through this practice, we were each able to prioritize the most important items to be accomplished among the lengthy to-do list of tasks and meetings. A review of our accomplishment of the “big three” at the end of the day allowed us to feel comfortable with our levels of productivity for the day, enabling us to leave the remainder of the to-do list at work and focus on our families until the next work day.
- We found that items of importance require dedicated scheduling within a daily planner. Even small tasks, if important, require a time allocation in order to get accomplished within a full schedule. By blocking important tasks within our schedules first, we could ensure the most important items for the day were accomplished.
- Establishing ideal daily and weekly routines assisted each of us in adjusting how we approach our work time. Planning an ideal day and week enabled us to first examine and then maximize our efficiency and productivity.

### **Advice to Others**

So often, “planning” simply involves the management of a calendar. We have found that being committed to the six steps has increased our efficiency and productivity. We suggest others experiment and find a system that works for them. Start simple and scale-up as habits are established (Selk & Bartow, 2015). The daily ritual of planning your work prior to the day was most profound in meeting our goals. Take time to plan: annually, semester, weekly, and daily.

Capitalize on your natural rhythms by scheduling the most challenging activities during your most productive time. Do the more mindless activities when you are more tired and/less productive. We found that by “touching tasks” only once, we could establish flow and complete tasks at a higher level. Finally, plan for emergencies. Not only do, tasks seem to always take more time than expected due to things that arise, time is needed to address the interruptions that regularly occur.

### **Cost or Resources Needed**

The FFP costs \$125 annually, which includes four 90-day planners shipped to you. The FFP also comes with a full set of videos to support the user in learning the strategies and systems. Other options can include free templates and only include the cost of printing.

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