MANAGING WORKLOAD
Pocketbook

2nd edition

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C o n t e n t s

Page

Inappropriate prioritisation

Not everything that comes into our lives is a priority. When we wrongly prioritise some things over others, we can unbalance ourselves.

If we **fail to prioritise** what we do, we become **reactive** rather than **proactive** and sometimes the trivial overrides the really important.

Keeping a log each day for a week of how you use your time can help to show patterns of inappropriate prioritisation. Though it initially takes time to do, it will reveal fascinating information that will help you improve your effectiveness.

Prioritising – strategies

A simple and very effective way to manage priorities is the URGENT–IMPORTANT grid. You can use the grid to identify the nature of a task.

Urgent and Important (UI)	**Non-Urgent but Important (NUI)**
Crisis management	Communication
Problems	Building teams
Some behaviour management issues	Planning ahead
	Anticipating issues and preparing
	Learning and preparing to enhance it
	Rest and recuperation
	Providing feedback to learners
Urgent but Not Important (UNI)	**Non-Urgent and Not Important (NUNI)**
Some interruptions	Quite a lot of email and snail mail
Some email/snail mail	Low level paperwork
Some other people's priorities	Bemoaning the teacher's lot
	Timewasters

Get into the habit of considering the urgency and importance of each task. If it isn't a UI or a NUI, then lower it in your priorities, or strike it out altogether.

Procrastination

Procrastination = avoidance behaviour that puts work off

We can put off doing tasks for a number of reasons:

- There are emotional difficulties attached to a task
- The task is large or complex, and we have not considered the steps involved
- The task involves interacting with someone we fear, or see as difficult to work with
- The job is uninspiring, requires a low level of skill, or does not seem to have a direct impact on improving learning

Procrastination – strategies

'Tackle **first** *the thing on your task list you most want to avoid!'*

- **Big or complex jobs** – spend some time breaking these into a series of smaller tasks, and plan when you will do each sub-task (eg: planning a set of lessons for a new syllabus)

- **High level cognitively challenging tasks** – do these when you have your highest energy levels in the day – avoid late afternoon (eg: understanding complex concepts and deciding how to teach them)

- **Low level, repetitive tasks** – work on these when you have low levels of energy. This can actually make such tasks more rewarding (eg: simple marking or making resources)

- **Emotionally challenging tasks** – predict the likely challenges and plan a range of assertive ways to deal with them. Ask others to help you think it through (eg: planning how to deal with the behaviour of a challenging student)

Procrastination – strategies

- **Above all, get started**. Do something, anything to get the ball rolling when you recognise yourself procrastinating (eg clear your desk of everything except one simple task and do it there and then)

- **Manage the complaining culture**. There can be in schools a culture of complaining about how bad things are. At a low level this can serve to acknowledge the strains of teaching, but if allowed to be the focus of interaction with others, it can lock you into a negative thinking cycle (page 47). Acknowledge the difficulties, then move on. (Eg: choose carefully who to spend time with during lunches and breaks, shift negative conversations to positive with a focus on humorous or successful events)

If you have a persistent problem with procrastination, the services of a life coach can be useful to help you break the patterns of behaviour that lead to it. Look for a coach who uses NLP coaching techniques.

Failure to delegate

The 'If you want it done properly do it yourself' attitude is the perfect way to destroy your work-life balance!

Most teachers and leaders in schools have the possibility of delegating some aspects of their work to others. There may even be genuinely appropriate roles for students to perform that help you and help them to develop new skills.

There are a number of reasons people don't delegate tasks. Here are some:

- They think people won't do it the way they want it done
- They feel they will lose control
- They are uncertain about the ability of others to meet deadlines
- They really enjoy the fine details of a job
- They believe there's no one to delegate to
- They are uncomfortable about asking others to do things they consider to be their responsibility
- It takes time to set up delegation; they think it's easier to do it themselves

Delegating – strategies

Handled properly, delegation can save you considerable time and lets you focus on the high-importance tasks on your list. If you lead people in your school, you need to develop your ability to delegate. Over time you enhance the skills of others and gradually free up more of your time. Delegation can be a long-term solution to pressure.

'I delegate the job of organising teams for house sports events in my tutor group. I identify a small team of people to carry out the task, brief them carefully on the outcome and we discuss the approaches they might take. I coach the ideas from them. It works well: they negotiate and this leaves me free to get on with other things like following-up absence and supporting individuals. As student confidence has grown I have steadily delegated more and more in my tutor group. Organising and leading aspects of the personal, social education lessons we have together has developed student social and health skills in its own right, alongside freeing me up.'

Linda,
Teacher and Form Tutor, Devon

About the author

Will Thomas BSc (Hons), MA, PGCE led a highly successful science faculty at South Bromsgrove Community College. The award-winning and best-selling author of 14 books in the field of coaching, well-being and creativity, Will is an inspirational trainer and writer in the field of human improvement. He has worked as an LA advisor and as consultant to Alistair Smith's company Alite. He is a Master Practitioner of NLP, a registered hypnotherapist and an accredited life coach and teacher of mindfulness. He runs Vision for Learning, an organisation that provides highly interactive and practical courses and offers coaching to support busy teaching professionals. Will is passionate about learning and making a difference in schools and to individuals. He can be contacted at: www.visionforlearning.co.uk   info@visionforlearning.co.uk or on 07775 506494

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