

Time Management: Making Time for What Matters Most

By Marleen Barrett

SPECIAL OFFER

for hardworking early childhood leaders

Clip and submit for
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this week.

Is this an offer you would be interested in? Most of us at, one time or another, have said we wished we had more time. But the truth is that if we had two more hours before long we would need two more. What we really need is to use the time we have in the most efficient and effective manner.

I have been a student of time management for many years. In fact, I learned that time management isn't really the right term. Ben Franklin referred to time management as life management. He said, *"Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff that life is made of."*

My study of time-life management began on my first job when I was given a Day Timer (a time management tool) and although I have lots of experience, I have yet to feel I am a master. Ongoing changes in technology bring new techniques to time-life management so I am always learning, discovering, and trying new tips. However, the basic principles are the same. I'll share three with you:

1. Understanding the Difference between Urgent and Important

Charles Hummel wrote a powerful little booklet called *Tyranny of the Urgent*. You have probably seen his work, often referred to as the Priority or Time Management Matrix (shown below).

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Crisis ▪ Pressing problems ▪ Deadline-driven projects, meetings, preparations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preparation ▪ Prevention ▪ Values clarification ▪ Planning ▪ Relationship building ▪ True re-creation ▪ Empowerment ▪ Some email

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Not Important

- Interruptions
- Some phone calls, email
- Some meetings
- Busywork
- Some phone calls
- “Escape” activities
- Irrelevant email

The tyranny is that people often spend most of their time on the ‘urgent’ items because they scream for your attention and keep you busy, but busy doesn’t mean productive.

The key to quality time-life management is to spend the majority of your time on the important items. Important items are the things that bring results. They may not be as fun as other items but they tend to produce greater long term value. A key to success is making a conscious choice to spend the largest amount of time in the “important and not urgent quadrant.” One reason this is key is because dealing with important non urgent items in advance helps make sure they don’t fall into the urgent category. Think of it like this—put your efforts in preventing a fire rather than having to put one out.

2. Discernment

Knowing what work, tasks, and events fall into each quadrant is where discernment is needed. Items may shift quadrants. Something that wasn’t important last month may rise to the important level this month. We all know urgent and important things regularly occur—you come down with a cold, a teacher calls in sick, the air conditioner breaks and it is the hottest week of the year. These are bound to happen, but knowing how to discern the rearrangement of the day’s priorities will keep you calm in a crisis. Tasks may even shift from ‘not urgent’ to ‘urgent,’ especially when you procrastinate. This is where the next principle becomes important.

3. Planning

Setting aside time to plan allows you to keep focused on what is important. I appreciate Hummer’s three types of planning as daily tools for managing time and life:

1. Daily Planning – Taking time at the beginning of each day to prioritize the events you are managing. Don’t pack the day too full and make sure to leave room for unexpected things as they are sure to happen.
2. Weekly Planning – At the end of the week review the week and set a plan for the next week.
3. Monthly Planning – Use one day (or half day) each month to focus on long range planning. Then make sure your daily and weekly planning aligns with these items.

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I know what you're thinking — *“Whoa! That takes discipline!”*

You're right! Our goal should be to practice discipline and keep the majority of each day working on the things in life that we value as most important.

Check out Hummer's publication for more insights on this topic:

Hummer, Charles E. (1994). *Tyranny of the Urgent*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Marleen Barrett is the Training and Event Coordinator at the McCormick Center. She holds a Masters in Training and Development from Loyola University. Her professional career has been in the non-profit world and included agriculture, children's ministry, and higher ed. She has lived in Illinois for 25 years but is still a Buckeye at heart and can be seen wearing her OSU scarlet and grey on a regular basis.

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