TIME MANAGEMENT FOR LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS

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The purpose of this article is to review the literature on time management, discuss relevant issues, and present possible solutions. Time management is an important issue in libraries today especially when increased technological and informational demands are coupled with possible decreases in funding. A review of the literature demonstrates how librarians spend their time and what activities they consider time wasters. Consolidating information from the various studies helps to identify time issues that occur frequently in libraries. There are several different strategies available for dealing with these time management issues. Individual librarians must establish their own priorities and goals in order to choose the most appropriate time management strategies for their own unique situations. Additional studies are necessary, however, in order to objectively assess how all members of the library staff spend their time and to evaluate how different strategies affect the time use of individuals working in libraries.

Managing a library presents unique time challenges to the professionals involved. Libraries are service-oriented institutions and the majority of their clients are "drop-ins" which creates issues of time management that are less problematic in other professional situations where time and clients are scheduled. These time challenges can increase frustration and decrease job satisfaction. Choosing appropriate time management strategies, however, can enhance professionals' lives by increasing work productivity, bolstering self esteem, and creating more time for personal pursuits. One way of increasing time management skills is to examine the research and literature to uncover common themes. By looking at how librarians in different settings spend their time and the activities they describe as time wasters, it is possible to suggest advantageous time management strategies. There are a multitude of techniques avail-

able, so librarians must analyze their own environments and examine their personal preferences to choose the most appropriate methods.

The essence of time management involves increasing efficiency and effectiveness in a limited time period. Berner (1987) defines these terms in his discussion of time management:

> Efficiency means finding the best way to do a particular job, whatever the job might be. Effectiveness, on the other hand, means examining a range of tasks, selecting the most important to be completed, and then completing them. It is a widely held management precept that efficiency means doing the job right, while effectiveness means doing the right job. (p. 272)

These two principles are essential to the application of time management strategies. In order to maximize their time, librarians must prioritize the most important tasks, and complete them in a timely manner.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME MANAGEMENT

Increasing technological and informational demands, coupled with decreasing budget and personnel allowances, emphasizes the importance of utilizing time management skills: "Public administrators throughout the country are struggling with a common dilemma: How can public libraries deliver services more efficiently and effectively with no increase—and in many cases a decrease—in spending?" (Samuelson, 1981, p. 309). The answer to this dilemma is time management.

Individuals and organizations could accomplish more in the same amount of time if they eliminated time

wasters and increased productivity. For example, one study has shown that the average American worker wastes 45 percent of the day (Gothberg & Riggs, 1988, p. 131). This result may seem hard to believe, but if researchers are able to identify this significant percentage of wasted time, organizations need to examine how their personnel are spending their time in order to channel these people into more productive activities. Furthermore, even though managers are upset about the increasing demands placed on them, they do not seem to be taking full advantage of the time resources they do have: "Many library managers are frustrated by the fact that more and more demands are being placed on what appears to them as an already crowded schedule. Many administrators may feel this stress because they do not manage their time well" (Leach, 1980, pp. 4-5). If librarians take advantage of time management strategies such as prioritizing, setting goals, and delegating, they will be better able to handle these increasing demands.

Time management offers benefits to both individuals and organizations. Individuals experience increased self-esteem and a greater feeling of control over their time, while organizations benefit from increased productivity and better services: "Taking positive action toward managing library time challenges can lead to increased feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. It can also lead to a stronger library program that meets the current and future needs of users" (Walster, 1993, p. 11). This self reinforcing cycle can lead to a win-win situation for all parties involved.

In order to balance conflicting demands and take advantage of the benefits of time management, librarians must become more efficient and effective at what they do. Although it may not be realistic to assume that librarians can ever accomplish everything they would ideally like to do, proper time management can help them identify priorities, delegate responsibility and manage the library in a manner that will maximize the limited time available.

TIME USE IN LIBRARIES

The research literature on time management in libraries identifies how librarians spend their time, and activities that are considered 'time wasters.' Most of the research involves questionnaires or time use studies in various settings. Although these types of self-assessment studies have inherent biases, they can prove instructive in identifying various time issues. Looking at the common themes across different library settings

suggests some possible solutions to time management problems.

Gothberg (1991a, 1991b, 1991c), and Gothberg and Riggs (1988) conducted a series of studies in various library settings to determine how librarians spend their time and what activities they considered 'time wasters.' Table 1 summarizes the top five 'time wasters' as ranked in each of these library settings and shows some common patterns of time use.

Throughout Gothberg's four studies of time management in different library settings, some common problems emerge as well as situations unique to each setting. All four different libraries included 'meetings' and 'attempting too much' in their top five time wasters. Public, state and special libraries seemed to have the most in common as they all included 'telephone interruptions' and 'drop-in visitors' in their top five time wasters. 'Inability to say no' seemed to be more unique to public libraries, while 'lack of self discipline' was a problem in state libraries, and 'inadequate, inaccurate or delayed information' was an issue in special libraries. Academic libraries had the most distinct list which included 'crises', 'lack of, or unclear communication or instructions,' and 'cluttered desk and personal disorganization' in their top five time wasters which were not in the top five of the other types of libraries. Perhaps there are circumstances unique to this environment that affect how time is spent.

Table 1: Top Time Wasters
(Gothberg & Riggs 1988; Gothberg, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c)

	Academic	Special	State	Public
Meetings	3	1	1	2
Attempting too much at once and estimating time unrealistically	1	5	3	4
Telephone interruptions	-	2	2	1
Drop in visitors	-	3	5	3
Inability to say no	-	-	-	5
Lack of self discipline	-	-	5	-
Inadequate, inaccurate or delayed information	-	4	-	-
Crises (personal and/ or staff)	5	-	-	-
Lack of, or unclear communication or instructions	4	-	-	-
Cluttered desk and personal disorganization	2	-	-	-

In another study, Jenda (1994) asked librarians in a large academic library to keep a daily log of their activities for three months to determine how much time they spent on various activities. Although these librarians were not asked what activities they considered time wasters, the method of study compares how much time librarians actually spend in different activities to how much time they believe they should be spending according to the goals and priorities of the organization.

> Data from such a study gives library administrators a chance to correct misallocations of time. Likewise, subject librarians can use their individual activity chart to identify duties to which they continually give lower priority and adjust their time allocations accordingly to obtain the desired balance of functions. (p. 106)

One interesting observation by Jenda is that librarians spent a large percentage of the time logged under 'administrative duties' in meetings or committee work which is a result similar to the Gothberg studies. Time management strategies directed at managing meeting and increasing productive time can influence efficiency at large academic libraries.

In 1996, van Deusen conducted a time use study in an elementary school library media setting. In this study, librarians logged their time use at fifteen minute intervals for two days. Although two days is a relatively short time period, the results are instructive for analyzing how time is used in this setting and comparing it to other settings. As in the other studies, time use is examined to gain insight and examine if time is spent in the most effective and efficient manner possible: "Analyzing the characteristics of the school library media environment may provide some insight into factors that influence how time is used. Such insights may help make decisions about automating, staffing, and scheduling the library media center" (p. 85). One interesting finding from this study was that in libraries with automated circulation systems, librarians were able to provide more individual assistance to students and more electronic support to teachers. In addition, the presence of adequate support staff was related to reduced clerical tasks by the professional librarians. These two results were also related to increased consulting activity with teachers: "Installation of automated circulation systems and provision of sufficient paid support staff were significantly related to reduced clerical work. These clerical tasks appear to have given way to services to teachers because they were also related to increased consulting activity" (p. 90). This seems to confirm that some automation

and proper delegation of tasks can increase librarians' time for other professional activities. Van Deusen also found that staff meetings are a particularly time consuming activity for school librarians (p. 90). This finding is consistent with other studies and seems to be an important issue for librarians that has time saving potential.

Everhart (1994) sampled work activities to determine if libraries with automated circulation systems spent their time differently than libraries without such systems. The results showed that media specialists with automated circulation systems spent more time in development of the education program, instructional development, and use of technology. Media specialists without automated systems, on the other hand, spent more time in circulation and production. These results seem to imply that automated systems free the librarian to perform other professional tasks. Everhart emphasizes that,

> [s]ince computers have assisted the media specialists in reducing the amount of time spent in circulation activities, perhaps there are other areas of technical services where similar shifts might occur. Online catalog maintenance, word processing, database management, automated catalog card production, and other activities might reap comparable rewards in time savings. (pp. 13-14)

Studies of these other areas could confirm the advantages of automated systems and supplement existing time management approaches in the library setting. It is important to remember, however, that there is a certain amount of learning involved in implementing a new system, and automation can be a time waster if there is insufficient training, if support is lacking, or if employees continue to use manual methods as "back up."

These studies have pointed out several key issues and common themes across different library settings as well as issues that seem unique to individual libraries. Matching time management strategies to these issues should be instructive in alleviating the time constraints placed on librarians.

TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Covey (1989), although not a librarian, presents a useful framework for examining time management. He asserts that people should be proactive and concentrate on important activities they can influence or change. The first step is for individuals to create personal mission statements:

Once you have that sense of mission, you have the essence of your own proactivity. You have the vision and the values which direct your life. You have the basic direction from which you set your long- and short-term goals. You have the power of a written constitution based on correct principles, against which every decision concerning the most effective use of your time, your talents, and your energies can be effectively measured. (pp. 108-109)

This mission statement is a central component of time management and gives people a broad perspective that allows them to select their priorities. Keeping these priorities in mind, and planning around them, helps people accomplish the things in their lives that are the most important to them.

In order to identify how people spend their time and how they get sidetracked from their most important activities, Covey establishes a matrix with four quadrants (p. 151):

Quadrant I important/urgent	Quadrant II important/not urgent
Quadrant III not important/urgent	Quadrant IV not important/not urgent

According to Covey, many people spend too much time in Quadrant I which reinforces a crisis mentality. Other people spend too much time in Quadrant III because they incorrectly think these urgent issues are important. Many people use Quadrant IV as an escape because even though these activities are neither urgent or important, they tend to be easy. The best place, according to Covey, for people to spend the majority of their time is Quadrant II because these are the effective, important activities that reflect people's priorities:

The objective of Quadrant II management is to manage our lives effectively—from a center of sound principles, from a knowledge of our personal mission, with a focus on the important as well as the urgent, and within the framework of maintaining a balance between increasing our production and increasing our production capability. (p. 160)

Focusing on Quadrant II empowers people to spend time on important and effective activities. It also en-

ables people to balance their lives around activities that are meaningful and rewarding for them. When people make a conscious effort to include these important goals in their schedules, they are using their time well.

Covey's paradigm is an important time management tool that is especially useful for establishing priorities and creating a satisfying balance of important activities. The importance of establishing priorities and goals is frequently discussed in the time management literature. For example, Cochran (1992) emphasizes the importance of goal-setting as a primary step in effective time use: "The first step in any effective time management program involves identifying personal and professional values and establishing goals and objectives in support of those values . . . All else in effective time management stems from this process" (p. 19). Having a mission statement, establishing goals, and planning based on personal priorities can help people make choices to effectively manage their time.

Once priorities have been established, it is useful to examine individual strategies that can alleviate specific time management problems. For example, time spent in meetings is one of the most frequent time wasters cited in the research literature. There are guidelines, however, that can help determine when meetings are necessary and there are strategies for creating situations where meetings are run as efficiently and effectively as possible. Hawkins (1989) provides useful strategies for keeping meetings on task:

Give the team advance notice of topics to be discussed in problem-solving or decision-making sessions. Do not underestimate the value of "thought time" for team members before being asked to comment or act on it . . . Avoid distractions during team problem-solving or decision-making sessions. (p. 13)

Planning ahead, informing others of the agenda, and keeping the meeting focused can reduce the amount of time spent in meetings while increasing their potential productivity. Raney (1988) shares a similar philosophy with respect to planning for meetings:

Run the meeting effectively: distribute the agenda ahead of time; let members know in advance what input they will be asked to provide at the meeting; start and end on time; focus on agenda items; stay on target; set time and purpose for the next meeting, and write minutes immediately. (p. 20)

Carefully managing meetings through the awareness of time wasters, can save valuable time without a loss in the flow of information: "with proper preparation and leadership, many meetings can move quickly

and still achieve their purpose, or need not be called at all" (Mauro & Weber, 1980, p. 20). Adopting these suggestions can limit the number of meetings, as well as the people directly involved in each meeting, and keep the content of the meeting focused and productive thus maximizing the use of this time for all personnel involved.

Delegating is another way to create more time for professional activities that require the skills of a trained librarian by assigning other tasks to appropriate staff members. It addresses the problem of 'attempting too much at once and estimating time unrealistically' by decreasing the number of tasks a manager attempts individually:

> [E]ffectively delegating to others is perhaps the single most powerful high-leverage activity there is. Transferring responsibility to other skilled and trained people enables you to give your energies to other high-leverage activities. Delegation means growth, both for individuals and for organizations. (Covey, 1989, p. 171)

Delegation can benefit all parties involved. It allows the manager to attend to high priority items, it increases the efficiency of the organization, and it reinforces subordinates by utilizing their skills to their fullest capacity: "Not only does delegation free the manager to pursue other tasks him/herself, delegation is a powerful tool for personal and professional growth for subordinates" (Hawkins, 1989, p. 12). Subordinates get an opportunity for growth and learning from their increased responsibility, and professionals have more time to accomplish the specified tasks for which they were trained.

In addition to assigning tasks at the most appropriate level, delegation can also be used to manage interruptions such as telephone calls and drop-in visitors. Cochran (1992) suggests that if managers can designate someone to answer the phone and screen visitors, many of these interruptions can be minimized or rescheduled at appropriate times.

Delegation is a powerful tool that addresses several common time management problems. Managers need to examine issues that may be keeping them from delegating responsibility effectively and commit themselves to assigning responsibility to others in order to manage their own valuable time more wisely.

There are several other time management strategies available that address issues such as handling paper, managing crises, and organizing the physical environment. The specific strategies selected should reflect the individual's mission statement, priorities, goals,

and unique time challenges. Time management is an individual choice of applicable strategies: "to be effective, time management must be personal. That is, librarians must adopt and adapt the suggested techniques to fit their own situations. No particular methodology or technique works universally" (Cochran, 1992, p. 11). Not only will different strategies apply to different people, but time management is a process that needs to be adaptable to changing situations at different points in time.

Due to the information explosion and ever changing technologies, librarians need to be prepared to adjust their strategies to accommodate change: "Librarians work in a volatile and changing environment. It is necessary to have choices and techniques that can be applied to new and different situations. One size does not fit all in time management for librarians" (Walster, 1993, p. 1). The strategies mentioned here represent only a sampling of possible techniques for effectively managing time. Although librarians have common time problems, these strategies only serve as general guidelines—each librarian is unique and needs to decide which methods will maximize his or her use of time.

CONCLUSION

Results from studies on how librarians spend their time and the activities they consider time wasters have revealed several areas where the application of time management strategies can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of library management. For example, managers can set goals and priorities and delegate tasks to the appropriate people to ensure that everything gets accomplished while allowing themselves to concentrate on activities that demand their specialized skills and training. In addition, reevaluating and restructuring time consuming meetings can maximize the information transmitted with the minimum number of essential people involved in the least amount of time possible. Many questions remain unanswered, however, and further research is necessary in order to complete the time management puzzle.

This article suggests strategies for dealing with problem areas based on time wasters identified by librarians. With the exception of the studies on the use of library automation and availability of support staff, however, none of the other strategies have been studied in order to evaluate their usefulness or their impact on librarians' time use. For example, how do changes in the way meetings are conducted affect time use in other areas, and what impact does increased delegation have

on both librarians and their subordinates? We need to determine how useful or practical these strategies are in order to assess the results of their application.

Libraries are composed of many people in different positions. The research has focused on the time use of librarians, but in order for the library to function as an organization, the time use of all members of the staff must be taken into consideration. How can a librarian determine how many tasks to delegate without knowing the time constraints of subordinates?

From the research available to date, we have an idea about what time management can do to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of individuals and organizations. What we need now are more detailed objective studies by outside observers on how all members of the library staff spend their time. Then we can apply some select time management strategies to these situations in order to measure how individuals working in libraries can change their time management strategies. Once these studies are conducted, we will be able to answer the questions posed above and make more concrete recommendations on how the commitment to effective time management, identification of time wasters, and careful selection of appropriate strategies can help librarians maximize their valuable time and increase the satisfaction of the library staff as well as the library patrons:

> Time management can also be a voyage of self-discovery, an attempt to make life more meaningful and work more important. As librarians we are in the position to make both our dreams and other people's dreams possible. We have the power to make life better. (Walster, 1993, p. 154)

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