

# Time Management for Administrators

By Susan Reese

**ADMINISTRATORS FACE A NUMBER OF CHALLENGES** when it comes to managing their time effectively, but one of the first things they learn is that it is important to set priorities—but do so with a certain amount of flexibility.

“You must prioritize your duties and responsibilities every day, and then realize that on most days what you plan on doing may not even be close to what you actually accomplish” says Jeanette Bovee, compliance administrator at South Tech Academy in Palm Beach County, Florida.

Deb Shephard, vice president of Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown, South Dakota, who is currently serving as interim president of the school, offers this advice: “You have to figure out in the morning what your priorities are. If you have an important job to do, then block out time to do it. Keep only that job in front of you, deal with all the interruptions that occur, and then go back to that job.”

Shephard recognizes that those interruptions are necessary because they keep administrators in touch with what is going on at their schools. “As an administrator, the biggest challenge is to keep your eye on the big picture,” she says.

Belinda McCharen, associate state director for career services for the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, also advises setting priorities but taking into account that there is an ebb and flow of time and that certain things surface at different times of the year that must take priority.

All three administrators acknowledge the important contributions of their staff members in making them effective managers of their time.

“I think it is extremely important for administrators to realize that they cannot do everything alone,” explains Bovee. “You must hire a capable and responsible staff to support you. You must be able to express to your staff what your expectations are and provide them with training and support when needed.”

McCharen has an assistant who understands her system of organization and helps maintain order in this administrator’s busy professional life. McCharen sits on a number of state boards and, as an international consultant in career education, travels to many meetings and gives many presentations.

“I use lots of notebooks for the boards,” she says. “I divide them by agendas and

minutes. My assistant labels the spines and puts them on the shelf, so that when I get ready to go to a meeting, I can just pull the one I need off the shelf.”

In addition to keeping a list of upcoming events in her BlackBerry, McCharen also keeps a folder with the information in it. But the biggest challenge comes when she returns from a meeting or presentation.

“You have to be disciplined when returning from a meeting,” McCharen explains. “You can’t just plop things on the desk and leave them. I sort them into stacks, and my assistant puts them into the binders.”

## Taming Technology

When it comes to technology, administrators have to find what works best for them as an individual. McCharen doesn’t know what she would do without her BlackBerry, and Bovee doesn’t even use one.

“I am one of those who still likes to



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use a book planner, viewing one week at a time,” Bovee notes.

Shephard says that some sort of planner is essential for administrators, and electronic ones work well. However, she

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cautions, “For someone who writes down a lot of information, the old-fashioned ones are best.”

Managing the onslaught of e-mails is another issue faced by administrators.

“E-mails are great and save some time,” says Bovee. “However, most administrators I know end up with a ton of e-mails that could have been handled more efficiently with a brief phone call. E-mails are also a source of documentation, and some things should not be in writing.”

Shephard loves e-mail and says she would never want to go back to the old days when sending a message to five people meant carbon copies and having to physically place messages into five mailboxes, but she adds a caution as well: “There is a temptation to over-communicate, so you have to rein yourself in sometimes.”

McCharen handles e-mails by not letting them pile up until her mailbox is something she doesn’t want to face. She has a wireless network at home, so she and her husband, who is also an administrator, sometimes spend time together sitting in their living room with their laptops answering e-mails. She also makes it a habit to arrive at meetings a little early. Not only does it help her feel less rushed and stressed, but it also gives her time to sit in her car or in the lobby returning e-mails and phone calls.

Shephard says she doesn’t know any administrators who don’t take reading with them wherever they go in order to make the most of any down time.

McCharen also makes the most of her

commute to work by using the time to return phone calls—she has a hands-free cell phone, “So I’m legal,” she adds. She also listens to informative or motivational books on CDs.

Shephard uses her own system of abbreviations to help her keep track of tasks such as phone calls. For example, she uses a bullet when she has called someone and is waiting for a return call to remind her of

the status and that she does not have to do anything else with it at the moment.

### Making the Most of Personal Time

When it comes to personal time, Shephard believes it is important for administrators to have something to relieve stress, and it should be something completely different from what they do at work—whether it is sports, a hobby such as gardening, or simply reading for pleasure.

Finding the right balance between work and home and finding time for family can be a challenge, however.

“I am a single parent with two teenage boys,” says Bovee. “I have had to learn how to balance my time with them and with the responsibilities of a home owner.”

She feels that “time is an investment,” so that is why two years ago she took the time to attend college on Saturdays in order to obtain her leadership certificate. While she acknowledges that it wasn’t easy, she feels it has definitely paid off. Family always come first for her, but Bovee finds it rewarding that

her school is successful and making such a difference in the lives of the students there.

Bovee describes her school as “a home away from home,” because both of her sons have attended it. Her youngest is still there, so Bovee says, “I always know when it is time to stop working and go home because of him.”

McCharen’s children are grown, but in spite of their habit of working at home together, she and her husband know the importance of taking time off and getting away from it all.

“We have a place at a lake that we go to most weekends in summer,” she explains, “and we only take work with us sometimes, but try hard to leave it behind until Sunday night. We read, talk and get to know each other again.”

And that brings us back to where we started—knowing what should take priority and when. ■