

# Organizational Skills

When you open your toolbox, do you have to rummage around for what seems like several minutes looking for a Phillips-point screwdriver? When you open your desk drawer, do you have to scatter papers all over the desk top to find a certain sales receipt or bill? Do you have to search all through your dresser drawers looking for one missing sock to match the one you need to wear? If your answer to these questions is “Yes,” then you may need some help in getting yourself organized in your personal life. This answer may also be an indicator of a need for organization in other areas of your life.

Key ingredients for your success in your new educational program or in the job that you eventually earn are effective time management and organization skills. If your life seems chaotic because you can’t perform to others’ or your own expectations, then you’re not alone. Just notice the people around you. Do these people always have lots of different activities going on at once? Do these people never seem to accomplish what they said they would? Do they seem confused when you or someone else asks questions or requests assistance? And what about their moods? Are they short with others around them? The answer to all of these questions is probably “Yes.”

Individuals whose lives are embedded with “a sense of urgency” that doesn’t allow them to follow through with tasks soon learn that steps must be taken to reintroduce order to their lives. When this order is reintroduced, relations with self, family, friends, and co-workers improve, job performance is enhanced, and good feelings about accomplishments become evident.

Employers and instructors consider effective time management and organizational skills as good work habits. To begin managing wisely the time you spend in class or in the laboratory, to prepare for class or lab assignments at home, and to manage your life at home and school simultaneously, you need to know and to put into practice some good time management techniques.

## **Say No**

You must learn to say “No.” You’re mature enough now to know your limitations. If you have an accounting or anatomy test next Wednesday, don’t tell your friends or family members you can go to a local nightclub on Tuesday night. If you have a hard time saying “No,” you need to consider delegating some of your work (in this case, your participation) to others. For example, ask your friends to invite another friend to the nightclub, explaining to them you have prior commitments.

## **Ask For Help**

Many adult students are scared to ask for help. They fear being seen as intrusive or dumb. Help comes in many forms so ask for it. If you’re struggling with math, see or email your instructor or a tutor. If you need financial

assistance, see your financial aid department. People all around you now are paid to help you so go to them for assistance or advice.

### **Prioritize**

Let's say that next Thursday is the due date for a major lab assignment. The Wednesday before, however, your boss needs you to work overtime. In addition, you had planned to take your children to the local livestock arena for a reptile show. You're in a mess, so how do you handle it? Remember step one: Believe. Then ask yourself these questions: How critical is each activity or expectation? How long will it take from start to finish to fulfill each activity or expectation? What do you need to do to complete each activity or expectation? With whom do you need to deal?

### **Set Timetables**

You can always measure how you're doing by establishing timetables. For example, take a pocket, wall, or desk calendar. Mark activity due dates appropriately. Prior to the activity due date, fill in other days with activities that will help you accomplish the mini steps that it will take to complete the big assignment.

### **Spend Time Wisely**

While attending school, you can impress your instructor and yourself by spending time wisely. Perhaps you have each day a full hour for lunch or dinner. Why don't you eat and review notes at the same time? Why don't you ask your instructor to join you so that you have the opportunity to ask additional questions or receive clarification? Why don't you allow yourself 20 minutes for lunch or dinner and 40 additional minutes in the classroom, lab, or media center. By spending your time at school wisely, you allow yourself more time at home with family and friends.

### **Enjoy Free Time**

Your physical and mental health well-being is key to successful school and job performance. Being too pushed for time causes stress, and too much stress can jeopardize your physical and mental states. Do yourself a favor: Prioritize, follow through, evaluate your work performed, and then enjoy some free time. Nobody will ever tell you to dismiss your friends, neglect your family, give up your golf game, or cancel your gym membership if you work hard to accomplish your academic and career goals. But when you fail to put "first things first," don't be surprised if your own conscience, a friend, a family member, or your instructor tells you to go back and get control through reordering your priorities.

Your instructor will inevitably identify you as one who possesses or does not possess effective time management skills. In addition, your instructor will almost automatically recognize you as one who can assume additional responsibilities when you put into practice some of the time management strategies just depicted. To become truly organized, however, and to show others in your class how to control their lives better, consider the advice cited below.

- Assess your class work, home, and job workload schedules weekly and then daily.
- Identify the most important things to be done.
- Review your schedule for appointments with instructors, friends, or other individuals.
- Reserve at least two to three days a week and large quantities of time (at least two hours a day) during these days to complete school assignments. If you're following the time management strategies previously cited, you really shouldn't need more than two hours per day, two to three days a week, to see your school work requirements to closure.
- Consider organizing your school requirements, your home responsibilities, and your job duties into an organized filing system that you can refer to and update at any time. If you don't have access to a computer, try loose-leaf notebooks or file folders.
- Remember to arrive at school or work on or before your scheduled hour for arrival every day. Be flexible enough to work in your classroom or lab during lunch or dinner. In short, do what you have to do to be a successful student. If you miss days due to illness, make sure you see your instructors so that make-up time may be scheduled.

There are great rewards for you when you're organized. There are great payoffs for you when you manage your time wisely. As a student and employee, you're guaranteed to reduce your stress and receive greater satisfaction from your school and work experiences. Professionally, you will develop the image of a person who is serious about getting things done and moving on to the next challenge.

## **Handling Stress**

Handling stress is more difficult than simply getting organized, although having strong personal organizational skills will go a long way in reducing many contributors to stress. The ability to deal with stress is more related to the makeup of your personality than to implementing a laundry list of sure-fire cures. However, you can improve on your stress management ability by remembering some important tips:

- Keep yourself organized as suggested earlier in this lesson.
- Break down large, complex tasks into manageable smaller segments, and attack them one by one. You will probably have to prioritize these segments or arrange them in some order of those that must be done sequentially.

- Sometimes there will be competing priorities. You will encounter occasions in which more than one requirement is due at the same time. These are likely to be the most stressful times, and you will just have to use your best judgment on which to attack first. Sometimes completing the easier item first will help with confidence by making progress and will help reduce stress levels.
- Don't beat up on yourself when your best isn't enough. All we can reasonably expect of others is their best effort.

## **Handling Change**

The nature of life seems to be adapting to change. In just this century, barely one generation, we have seen transportation progress from horse-drawn carriages to supersonic airline transports and routine space shuttle flights. Communications progressed from primitive telegraphs to instant satellite-relay conversations world-wide. For most of us, personal computers simply did not exist for the first half of our lives or more. These parts of our lives have changed many times in only a relatively few years. You can expect more changes.

One of Charles Darwin's theories was "Survival of the Fittest." By this he meant the strongest of a species will survive the perils of life. If he were alive today, he might well change this theory to "Survival of the Most Adaptable." If you resist change and fail to get in line with the rest of the world, you may be left behind in the dust of those who succeed. If you view change in a positive manner and hold fast to a determination to make it work for you, you should be able to handle changes that life brings your way. Keep in mind that you will probably have to spend some time and energy, and perhaps some personal resources, to accommodate changes and come out on top. No guarantee . . . but rewards usually come to those who work for them.

