10 TIPS FOR MANAGING TIME AND PRIORITIZING TASKS

1. **Know yourself.** Keep a detailed log of how your time is spent. Identify what tasks take the most time, when you’re most productive, and common time wasters.

2. **Avoid multitasking.** Studies suggest that we can only focus on one project at a time and only for 40-90 minutes. Multitasking is a myth. Strive to “chunk” your time; trying to get everything done at once can result in nothing getting done at all.

3. **Set goals and reward yourself.** Set SMART goals; break down each large goal into key tasks and smaller “to-do” items. To stay engaged, celebrate each milestone as it is achieved.

4. **Use a prioritizing formula.** A structured format can help with important decisions concerning how to spend your time / what tasks to do first. Sample formats include Deadline/Payoff, Paired Comparison, Importance/Time, and Richard Bolles’ Prioritizing Grid (discussed in That Elusive Work-Life Balance).

5. **Invest time in scheduling.** Use calendars, task reminders, and/or Gantt charts to schedule your time. Chunk smaller or similar tasks together, but remember to build in some wiggle room, leave time for interruptions, and schedule regular breaks.

6. **Be clear and concise when communicating.** Use e-mail subject line, to, and cc fields effectively (i.e., subject line links to email purpose, to notes key recipients(s), cc reserved for FYI). Ensure any requests for action are clearly stated, addressed to specific individuals, and include due dates. Leave clear and concise voice mails; don’t assume someone has your phone number. Develop appropriate/effective agendas to guide meetings.

7. **Make effective use of technology.** With such a wide range of technologies available pick something that will work for you – not what’s “hot” today. Invest the time to fully understand every technology you use. Remember, low-tech solutions (e.g., tickler file) can sometimes work the best so don’t rule those out.

8. **Avoid management by crisis.** If you’re always fighting fires, you’re not productive. Plan your time and tasks effectively; don’t ignore upcoming deadlines as they tend to “sneak” up. Remember – stress and emotions interfere with productivity and impact decision-making capabilities, so ask for help if you get overwhelmed and/or feel unable to cope.

9. **Delegate effectively.** Only pass items on to someone who understands the task specifications/deadline and has the skills/capacity to complete it effectively. Build in some extra time to monitor progress and review the product.

10. **Learn to say no.** If you can’t complete a task, it’s alright to say no. Be sure to provide a reason and work together to find solution (e.g., shifting priorities, delegating tasks, getting more resources).