Top 15 tips for effective time management.

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We are all working much harder than we were 20 years ago. The job of an academic has changed dramatically over the last 10 years and many people in the profession are finding themselves stressed out not only because they have too many things to do but also because there is too little time to do the things they want to do. It may also be the case that many people are spending too much time doing the wrong sort of things. Inability to manage your workload could lead to stress - so the key is good time management. It is all about putting life into your time. Here is a list of tips that if followed properly should lead to better time management. Many of the tips are little more than commonsense but it is surprising how many people do not do these kinds of things!

1. *Plan ahead* – Get a shorthand notebook and make regular "to do" lists, crossing off items as they are completed. Plan each week (say) on a Sunday. Map out what you have to get done in the days ahead and attach some kind of priority rating. Plan each day in as much detail as possible at the beginning of the week and fine tune as you go.

2. *Control interruptions* – One of the immediate and morale boosting advantages of a weekly and daily plan is that you don't waste half the morning getting started but you could easily fall victim to distractions caused by those who are not so well organized. You don't have to be anti-social, just arrange a time that is suitable to you.

3. *Learn to prioritize* – Learn the difference between urgent and important tasks and prioritize the things that need doing urgently. With urgent tasks go for speed rather than quality. With important tasks it is necessary to schedule in the time that is needed to complete the task.

4. *Develop an effective filing system* – This is a must! You will not have waste time looking for things if everything has a place.

5. *Streamline administration* – Do things to a "good enough" level rather than perfection.

6. *Read wisely and efficiently* – Work out whether apparently relevant papers, documents, books etc. are really relevant to read as this. If possible read the main points only (executive summary, abstract etc.).

7. *Reduce the number of times you handle a piece of paper* – For instance, pass on things which you know you are not going to read.

8. *Know when you are most productive* – there is usually a time (or times) of day when you are at your most productive (for instance I tend to work best early in the morning).

9. *Get an early start or work until late* – Getting in early to work or staying after everyone has gone are good ways of avoiding distractions from colleagues and getting work done more efficiently.

10. *Learn to say "no"* – This is easier said than done but sometimes you have to think about your own work priorities.

11. *Do things as they come in* – This is one of the most efficient ways of keeping on top of your work although it is not unusual for a number things to land on your desk simultaneously. This is where learning to prioritize comes in.

12. *Never neglect your "to do" list* – This will ensure that you never forget anything that's important. It is also helpful to integrate "to do" lists into weekly and daily plans which you also keep in your notebook.

13. *Be ruthless about meetings* – many of the meetings that people attend have little or no consequence for that person. Only go to a meeting if you think you have to attend or have something to contribute. Going to too many meetings might be a sign of work-avoidance.

14. ***Keep meetings within time limits*** – If you do go to a meeting ask the convenor or chair to set a time limit. Meetings have a habit of dragging on and filling the space available. Make sure meetings have preset objectives so that everyone is working toward the same end point.

15. ***Delegate tasks wisely*** – Although the amount of administration will differ from person to person, give administrative tasks to those who are best suited to and/or are paid for doing it.