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ABSTRACT

Intended for adults with learning disabilities, this paper offers time management strategies in a work-sheet format. The paper, which was written with the assistance of adults with learning disabilities, explains setting goals, planning, organizing time, and avoiding stress. Guidelines for goal setting include: focus on the present; set goals that are measurable and have a beginning and an end; divide large goals into small parts; set a tentative time limit for the completion of each goal; establish some long-term goals; set realistic goals; revise goals if progress is not being made. Planning suggestions include setting priorities, maintaining flexibility, and scheduling a daily planning time. Time management suggestions include: make "to do" lists; use calendars or appointment books; and avoid time traps. Time management suggestions for managing a household are specifically discussed and include paying bills; buying, keeping and preparing food; doing housecleaning and laundry; organizing space; and sharing responsibility. The final section offers ideas for avoiding stress such as: organize yourself; keep a daily journal; accept and embrace change; and set aside time for relaxation. The document includes eight references and addresses of five organizations serving adult learning disabled persons. (DB)

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TIME MANAGEMENT: STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS

By Peggy A. Cvach, Ed.D.

Rhona C. Hartman, Editor

"Set a goal and keep it," said a successful young adult with learning disabilities when asked what advice he would give others. He has refused to let his life be ruled by his disability. The young man's full statement was, "I would tell anyone, especially someone with a learning disability, to set a goal, and don't let anything stop you from reaching it. If you are interrupted on your path, keep looking for other ways to reach your goal! Get more advice or another partner and take it slowly, but keep that goal."

Yet, before you can keep a goal, you need to work out a plan to manage time so that you can accomplish it. Unfortunately, adults with learning disabilities report having more problems than most with being organized

and managing time wisely. Impulsivity, fear of failure, distractability, inaccurate listening or reading ability, disorientation when faced with change, and imprecise ability to measure time or space are some characteristics of people with learning disabilities. Such disorganization can prevent you from setting goals efficiently or managing time effectively to accomplish goals.

This paper contains time management strategies that can help you set goals so you can make the most of yourself, written with the assistance of

many other adults with learning disabilities. We all set a number of different types of goals. For example, a long term goal might be to own a business; a medium term goal could be to read four books a year; or a short term goal may be to socialize with a friend. You can work toward achieving these types of goals using the strategies presented here. This paper explains setting goals, planning, organizing time, and avoiding stress. Activities are included to help you develop your skills in each area.

Before you can keep a goal, you need to work out a plan to manage time so that you can accomplish it.

SETTING GOALS

One difference between people who achieve and those who don't is their skill at setting goals for themselves. Those who have goals and who are working towards them:

- Feel a sense of accomplishment.
- Say "no" promptly and without guilt to interruptions.
- Complete one project and move onto another.
- Meet deadlines with time to spare and move on to the next task.

On the other hand, those who are uncertain of their goals:

- Say "yes" to too many requests from others, whether important or not.
- Feel at "loose ends" too often.

- Have too much "free" unproductive time.
- Drift from one task to another, leaving many of them unfinished.
- Run out of time.
- Appear stressed, distractable, hurried, tense.

The process of setting goals helps you determine what is important and what is not. It helps you decide how you will use your time. We have adapted the following strategies from material which has been written by others about how to set goals. Basically, these strategies include: focusing on the present; setting measurable goals; dividing goals into smaller parts; setting a time limit to complete goals; establishing long term goals; setting realistic goals; and revising goals! Try to follow the suggestions and work on the activities in order to set some goals for yourself.

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Focus on the Present.

Think about what makes you happy and ask yourself what activities you want to add to your life. What you like to do? What have you enjoyed in school, at home, on vacation, on a day off, at work, or anywhere? List 3 things you liked most to do alone and 3 you liked most to do with others.

By myself I like to:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

With others I like to:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Also think about the people you know—family, people you know from school or work, people you would like to meet or whom you have read about or seen on TV or the movies. List 5 words which describe the kind of people you like.

I like people who are:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Think about your life in the last month. List 3 things you would like to change so that you could enjoy life more.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Set Goals that are Measurable — That Have a Beginning and an End.

Think about one goal. For example, you want to buy a car.

You would think about accumulating \$500 for a down payment, and saving additional money for insurance, and the amount you would need to repay your car loan each month. Then figure out how long it would take you to accumulate the necessary money. When can you purchase and drive the car? How long can you expect the car to last? If you know how long it will take you to reach a goal, it makes it easier to achieve.

Divide Your Goals into Small Parts.

Concentrating on one task at a time reduces the frustration of facing too many tasks at once. You will achieve success by dividing your goal into smaller parts and thinking about the one step that needs to be done before the next can be started. For example, if your goal is to read 4 books a year, figure out how many chapters or pages you can read in a day or week, and arrange time to do that.

Set a Tentative Time Limit for the Completion of Each Goal.

Think about the time needed for reaching each part of the goal instead of facing the entire task at once. For example, if your goal is to loose 25 pounds, think about loosing a pound a week and realize that you could reach your goal in less than 6 months!

List several goals you have set for yourself in the past.

- 1) _____
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
- 2) _____
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
- 3) _____
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
- 4) _____
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____

Check those that you did accomplish.

What made reaching those goals possible? Make a list beside each goal of the things you did to accomplish this goal.

Concentrating on one task at a time reduces the frustration of facing too many tasks at once.

• **Establish Some Long Term Goals.**

In five years, for example, where do you want to live? What type of job do you want? How do you want to spend your leisure and vacation time?

Use the space below to write down 3 goals:

Short Term Goal: _____

Medium Term Goal: _____

Long Term Goal: _____

• **Set Realistic Goals.**

Think seriously about each goal you have written down. Be sure that you have chosen goals which you can achieve. Talk over your choices with one or two people who know you well to see what they think about how you might attain your stated goals. Balance their opinions and suggestions with your own ideas.

• **Revise Your Goals if You Don't Make Progress.**

Review your goals monthly. If little progress is being made, change the steps. New experiences may encourage you to eliminate one goal and substitute another.

PLANNING

Once you have set some goals, you need to plan how to organize your time so you can reach the goals. This is not easy, for it takes time and thought to make a plan of action which will bring results. *Setting priorities* (listing most important steps first) and *maintaining flexibility* (being able to revise the plan in order to make progress) are important parts of planning and organizing.

There is for everyone, including those with learning disabilities, the fear of being judged, making a mistake, being held responsible, or failing. These fears may stop you from trying at all. Yet, once you see the results of effective planning, those fears become less important. Planning and organizing help you:

- trust in yourself;
- make informed decisions;
- use personal and community resources to the fullest;
- find needed resources;
- maintain and strengthen family relationships; and
- increase abilities and decrease limitations.

ORGANIZING YOUR TIME - TIME MANAGEMENT

Time is constant and totally predictable, but it is also one of our least understood, poorest managed, and most abused resources. Successfully managing your time can be scary for it really means taking responsibility for the quality of your life. *But you can meet the challenge of managing time!* Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I want?
- What goals have I set?
- How much time do I have to accomplish them?
- Of the tasks I have to do, what should I do first?
- Which tasks will make the best use of my time?

You can create your own success formula. As you try to juggle your many hats — student, son/daughter, parent, spouse, employee, co-worker—both the demands on your time and the need to set priorities increase. By organizing your time, however, you can create a life-style that responds both to your needs and the needs of those around you. Your system of time management has to be yours for it to really work for you. Try some of the following suggestions.

• **Lists.**

One of the easiest and most effective ways of managing your time is to make lists. If you don't use lists, start a list now! One very effective time management strategy is to schedule 5 to 15 minutes at the beginning or end of the day as *planning time*. During this time, focus your attention on writing out on paper or recording on audiotape the lists you will need to accomplish your goals. Good time managers work from three lists: a *master list* (goals), a *projects list* (steps to reach the goals), and a *"to do" list* (daily tasks).

Once you see the results of effective planning, fears become less important.

You are probably saying, "But, how can I write three lists if I've never even developed one list." If you have been working on the exercises in this paper, you have really made several lists.

Look back at your goals. Use these as your master list. What did you say was your long term goal? Buy a car? Take a trip across the country? Learn to dance, fly, or sail? Lose 25 pounds? Keep your master list in a place where you can look at it regularly—on your desk, in your wallet, or near the telephone.

Did you try to divide your goal into steps? Did you think about what parts of your goal could be accomplished before others? Think about these things and create a projects list. These will be tasks you will need to do in the next weeks and months to help you reach your long term goals. Your projects list might say, "pick up car loan forms from the bank," "get trip maps from library," or "eat fruits and vegetables instead of cookies." Creating the projects list will help clarify your thinking about the long term goal and serve as the feeder for your "to do" lists.

When you are beginning your own time management program your 5 to 15 minutes a day may be devoted entirely to creating the master list and projects list. After these are determined, then your daily planning time can be spent mostly on creating your "to do" lists.

Write or audiotape a list of specific tasks needed to accomplish your goal. Study your list and then write or audiotape the tasks in order of importance or the sequence necessary to reach the goal you have set. This is your "to do" list. At first, it may be hard to create these lists, but it will get easier with practice. Train yourself to go down your "to do" list without skipping over difficult items. Your "to do" list might have such items as "call banks to find out auto-loan rates," or "shop for apples and carrots."

☛ Calendars.

Calendars or appointment books are another way to stay organized. Calendars serve two major purposes: they can tell

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you where you will be and what you have done. Here are some general suggestions for using calendars.

- Write on the calendar all firm commitments at the beginning of the year: birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, vacations. Add appointments, work or school deadlines, social events, etc. as you find out about them.
- When you write an appointment on your calendar, be sure to indicate where, when, and what. "Meet Judy" will not be enough information on your calendar to remind you to be at the campus bookstore at 3:00 with necessary money to purchase a birthday present for your friend.
- Mark the current date on your pocket calendar for instant access. Use paper clips or rubber bands, or cut off the bottom corner of the previous day's page. On a wall or desk calendar, cross off yesterday so you can tell immediately what day is today.
- Post the family/housemate calendar in a central location such as the refrigerator or bulletin board so that everyone can post and see upcoming dates.

A student with a learning disability reported beginning to use a calendar when she entered junior high school. She puts important school assignments and social activities on

General Tips for "To Do" Lists

- Use the same kind and color of paper for your lists, and keep your lists available all day. One person uses a secretarial pad and keeps it in her purse. Another has a note pad which attaches to the car dashboard since driving is a regular part of his day and most daily items involve driving.
- Cross off tasks from your list as you complete them. This will give you a picture of your progress.
- Your "to do" lists should note only those things which are special to do and need not include activities which are regular parts of your day. For example, "eat breakfast, take shower, get dressed" are everyday tasks and need not be on your list.
- Review all your lists daily. As you accomplish some tasks, the goal may change slightly or may no longer be important. As a result, you may change your lists to take new information into account.

the calendar which is hanging in her room. She said that marking off each day helps her keep track of the days of the week and months, and helps her process the abstract concept of time.

☛ **Time Traps.**

Beware! As carefully as you may try to make your lists and keep your calendars, there may be hidden barriers to managing your time effectively. To help you locate the hidden barriers in your life, we have made a list of *time wasters* for you to avoid. Check the ones you have found in your life and try to avoid it next week.

- lack of priorities
- try to do too much
- leave tasks unfinished
- don't say no
- indecision and procrastination
- do not delegate
- am disorganized, do not plan well
- get distracted by others, let others interrupt
- over commit myself so I can't do what I promised
- confused about what needs to be done
- try to be perfect
- poor health habits, little exercise, not enough rest
- do not anticipate disasters
- keep too many records
- pay too much attention to unimportant details
- can't get started or
- start without thinking through the task
- make unnecessary phone calls, socialize too much between tasks
- get off the subject or task
- prepare too much
- collect too many resources

Can you list other time traps that made you especially susceptible?

MANAGING A HOUSEHOLD - TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR EVERYONE

Sooner or later, young adults assume or share responsibility for managing a household. Let us use that example to illustrate how time management strategies can help to achieve the long term goal of living in a well managed home.

Remember, make a project list which will help you achieve the long term goal. In this case, the project list will include:

- paying bills;
- buying, keeping, and preparing food;
- doing home cleaning and laundry chores;
- organizing space; and
- sharing responsibilities.

Before making your to do list each day, review these tips for organizing these projects. These tips are taken from books listed at the end of the paper as well as interviews with young adults with learning disabilities who have set up apartments with roommates, and some experienced homemakers who have raised families with learning disabilities. All agree that being organized helps them accomplish their goals.

Sooner or later, young adults assume or share responsibility for managing a household.

☛ **Paying Bills.**

A desk is a must! It is essential to have a specific location in your home where the "business" of the household can be conducted. The business includes bill paying and filing important papers such as insurance policies, legal documents (apartment lease or house mortgage) or appliance warranties.

A simple filing system is necessary to keep your business papers in order and easy to locate. Being able to locate all the papers means that if you need your health insurance policy number to file for reimbursement for medical expenses, you can find it at once. Pulling the TV warranty card from its place will enable you to call for service should the TV need attention.

Keep the filing system simple. Start with a small accordion-pleated file for keeping papers and legal documents in alphabetic order. Use another such folder with a separate section for each month of the year for bill-paying, banking,

and tax record keeping. Whenever you receive a bill put it with the others of that month. Twice a month, prioritize the bills you must pay, pay them, and balance your checkbook. Keep bank statements and canceled checks together in the first or last pocket of the "bills" file.

• **Buying, Keeping and Preparing Food.**

Food is essential! Buy non-perishable food (rice, sugar, noodles, flour, pancake mixes, canned goods) in quantity and shop for perishables (meat, milk, vegetables, fruits) weekly instead of daily. Both such strategies save money and time — both of which you can use for other things.

Devote some meal preparation time for cooking several meals at once. Spaghetti sauce, soups, stews, chili, casseroles are all foods which can be cooked in large quantities, divided into meals for two or three nights, and frozen for later use.

Invest in two of the most timesaving appliances on the market — the slowcooker and the microwave oven.

Some of the quantity cooking mentioned above can be prepared the night before, put into the slowcooker in the morning, cooked all day, and be ready to eat and/or freeze that night. Recipes for slowcooker meals are easy to follow and make good use of the less expensive cuts of poultry or beef.

The microwave cooks fresh vegetables and fish perfectly and quickly. Many use the microwave to defrost and heat the made-ahead meals, refrigerated left-overs, or to cook frozen commercial dinners.

• **Doing Housecleaning and Laundry.**

Few of us enjoy cleaning and doing laundry, but many report feeling better—more in control of the environment—when the house is tidy and clothes are clean. Consider these ideas:

- Divide cleaning into segments. For example, take 15 to 20 minutes each day on maintenance (stacking newspapers, emptying trash, straightening towels, making beds, washing dishes) with extra time devoted one day each week to specific tasks such as laundry, vacuuming, or bed-linen changing.
- Clean rooms in circles (dust, vacuum or sweep, empty trash, wash tiles or appliances).
- Keep all cleaning supplies in one container which you carry with you from room to room—or, if your home is more than one floor, have duplicate containers on each floor.
- Do something pleasant while you clean or iron—listen to music, sing, or watch TV.

- Use two clothes hampers or baskets — one for colors, one for whites for presorting before washing.

- Plan what you will wear through the week and clean, iron, and mend those things at one time.

• **Organizing Space by Keeping Similar Items Together.**

Even if space is limited, separate the winter clothes from summer items in your closet. Store similar items (socks, sweaters, underwear, shirts/blouses) together in drawers or on shelves.

Be sure that each member of the household has a place in the bathroom for personal items, and that common items (fresh towels and sheets, new soap, toilet paper) are located near where they will be used.

In the kitchen, make separate places for each of the following: cooking utensils, pots and pans, dishes, glasses, eating utensils, cans and packages of "dry" foods, spices and cooking oil, and so on.

Keep reading material (books, TV guides, magazines), cards, board games, sports equipment to be used by all members of the household in a commonly used area, such as a bookshelf in the main room. Personal items should be kept in each person's bedroom.

Identify a basket or tray as the one place the daily mail is placed before each person takes his or her own.

• **Sharing Responsibility.**

A time-saving strategy which is truly an exercise in time management is that of sharing responsibility for doing all the tasks of running an efficient home. Families of parents and children, as well as units of housemates, can develop systems in which each person, young or old—disabled or not, takes on some of the work. Some ideas for task-sharing include:

- **Meal Planning:** Household members meet as a group, each person suggests a main dish, vegetable, dessert to plan the meals for a week at a time. A shopping list is generated from this list; meals and menus are posted on the refrigerator; first one home (or the designated cook) starts cooking.
- **Cleaning:** Household members meet to list all the major weekly chores—vacuum, clean kitchen, clean bathroom, take out garbage, shop for food, cook, set/clear table, wash dishes, etc. Volunteers take regular assignment to be done on a specific day. People might develop favorite jobs and do them always, or jobs can be rotated.

- Major tasks: Again, the household meets to discuss the nature of the jobs—spring garden cleanup, fall leaf raking, garage cleanup, cupboard or closet cleaning/reorganizing, car maintenance, etc. The group designates a time (perhaps one weekend a month for regular jobs, or a plan for emergency jobs such as snow or ice removal). Household members either volunteer to take charge and enlist the help of the others, parents assign these tasks, always taking the ability of the children into consideration.

AVOIDING STRESS

“Sometimes I feel like I’m going to explode because I am pulled in too many ways.”

“When he calls, I get a knot in my stomach because I have not finished the work.”

“When I walk into the IEP meetings I get a headache.”

“I am stretched as far as I can go.”

Have you ever made a similar comment? Or wanted to? These are the remarks of people in stress! Stress is a physical reaction to both negative events and pleasurable occurrences. Thus, you can have stress facing a work deadline or when falling in love! We all experience stress, we each develop unique symptoms of stress, and we can learn to manage our lives to reduce or control the stress.

In a very real sense, each of us generates our own stress symptoms (headache, burning stomach, itchy skin, eye twitch, eating or sleeping too much or too little, etc.). The more you can “own” your stress, the more you can control it. When you can recognize your own stress symptoms, you can ask, “Why am I doing this to myself?” Thus, identifying your stress symptoms and seeking the causes of them, can lead to modifying your behavior and reducing your stress.

One of the most common reasons given for negative stress is “not enough time,” which is a direct result of poor time management. In addition to all of the time management strategies discussed in this paper, there are some that apply directly to stress reduction. With special attention to these, you can begin to reduce the tension, feel better, and use your energy in a positive way.

☛ Organize Yourself.

Keep those 5 - 15 minutes a day for your planning time. Use it not only to plan your “to do” list, but also to reflect on your current life, activities and people involved with you, and try to sort out your priorities.

We all experience stress, we each develop unique symptoms of stress, and we can learn to manage our lives to reduce or control the stress.

☛ Keep a Daily Journal.

Write or audiotape not only the events of the day, but also your feelings about those events. Your journal can provide you with clues about how you manage your time and what “triggers” stress symptoms.

☛ Accept and Embrace Change.

Change is an inevitable part of living. If you fear change, ask yourself, “what is the worst thing that could happen if... and how will I handle that?” Being prepared for the worst may help you deal with what is usually not as bad as your initial fear.

☛ Set Aside Time for Relaxation.

The key to a long and productive life is the ability to relax. Relaxation is frequently just a change in pace and type of activity. A five mile run would relax one person, but a walk around the block would help another, while listening to music would be the best for someone else.

Here are some things that people have said they do to relax. Check the ones you might enjoy.

- _____ Talk on the phone to someone you love.
- _____ Lock the door and take a long bath.
- _____ Go for a walk right after you get home.
- _____ Browse for 10 minutes in a gift or book shop.
- _____ Buy yourself some flowers.
- _____ Do a favor for someone.
- _____ Read or listen to a poem.
- _____ Daydream.
- _____ Listen to a soothing record or tape — with earphones
- _____ Read or listen to a good novel.
- _____ Go birdwatching.

Make your own list of favorite ways to relax.

SUMMARY

Effective time management can help you achieve your goals. Activities in this paper provide a way to practice looking at your life and thinking about how to change it for the better by *setting goals*. The importance of *making plans* to achieve those goals were described and specific ways to *organize your time*—Time Management—were discussed. With practice you will be able to make lists, use a calendar, and be able to identify time traps which act as barriers to reaching your goals.

The special section about *Managing a Household* sets forth some examples of good time management for you to try. And finally, the result of poor time management—

stress —is described and ways to manage that barrier to reaching your goals are listed.

Many of the references listed at the end of this paper are available at your local library or you can ask your librarian to find related materials for you to read.

Be firm in your commitment to be an effective time manager. Give the ideas here a chance to work for you. Let your roommates or family know that you are practicing time management strategies so that they can cheer you on. Practice using the ideas presented here and note your results.

Good luck with your Time Management program.

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Special thanks to the young adults with learning disabilities and their instructors at the following programs:

Center for Unique Learners
5705 Arundel Ave.
Rockville, MD 20852
(301) 231-0115

Life Development Institute
P.O. Box 15112
Phoenix, AZ 85060
(602) 254-0822

Para-Educator Center for Young Adults
New York University
One Washington Place
New York, NY 10003
(212) 998-5800

Threshold Program
Lesley College
29 Everett St.
Cambridge, MA 02238
(617) 491-3739

For additional information about postsecondary programs for adults with learning disabilities, contact:

The HEATH Resource Center
One Dupont Circle, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036-1193
(800) 544-3284 (toll free), (202) 939-9320 (in the DC Area)

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