

Time management

(A resource for community advice offices and community-based paralegals brought to you by NADCAO, from the Paralegal Manual published by the Education and Training Unit and the Black Sash.)

There is always too much to do and too little time to do it in. Time management is a skill that can help you to organise how to use your time. It can help you to make extra time so that you can do more things - without feeling that you have too much to do.

A diary is the most important tool you have when you start to manage your time.

To manage the way you use time, you must know what your commitments are, for example to your family, your friends, your job, and your organisational work outside of your job.

Problems happen when the demands from different commitments clash. So you need to plan your time.

To do this you must start by identifying your regular commitments and drawing up a list of the demands each commitment makes on you. All your other commitments must be fitted around these routine commitments. Write them in your diary.

Think ahead about all these non-routine things that will happen, so that you start planning for them now (for example, a friend's wedding, an evaluation of your organisation, and so on).

What are the things that impact on your time?

- Being disorganised - wasting time looking for lost documents
- Unrealistic deadlines which mean you always feel you are 'behind' with your work
- Spending hours in the car getting to meetings
- Constant interruptions
- Feeling too busy and under stress all the time

Time-wasters

Most people waste time in similar ways. Some examples of common time-wasters are:

- disorganisation
- procrastination (leaving things to the last minute)
- the inability to say no
- lack of interest
- burn out
- visitors

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- telephone calls
- waiting
- meetings
- personal crises

You can identify your own time-wasters and write them down. Then think of ways to avoid these time-wasters.

Managing your time

When you have many different demands on your time, you must decide **which ones to do** and how to do them. There are three questions you can ask.

- Is the task necessary?
- Am I the right person to do this?
- What is the most efficient way of doing it?

If you are too busy to do something, or it is inappropriate for you to do it, then you should hand the task to someone else. This is called **delegating**.

You must also plan your use of time and set your objectives. Objectives are the things that you plan to achieve. If you are clear about your objectives you can do things in a useful order more easily. Plan your objectives as:

- Long-term objectives
- Medium-term objectives
- Short-term objectives