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REALISTIC STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS TO ALIGN TIME MANAGEMENT WITH  
GOALS

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ABSTRACT

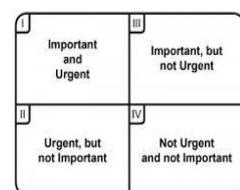
How was your day? This is an oft heard question which we answer with the habitual response: fine. What if we ask ourselves what our Ideal Day would look like and what would go into making it 'ideal'. At the end of the day we need to see whether we achieved what we wanted and acted like the person we wish to become. Such introspection can be encouraged for students, with respect to setting goals and managing time as they are of intrinsic value. They need to consciously visualize and design their ideal life. If they can live their today as an 'ideal day' and make it their goal to replicate it for the next five years where would they be and what would they become. If they align their goals with time management they will be prepared to answer with conviction, the question: where do you see yourself in five years from now? Students can be guided to learn various feasible strategies to manage their time to achieve their personal and professional goals.

**Key words:** time management strategies, interval training, goals

Success and time management are intrinsically intertwined. Time well spent leads to success; time squandered leads to failure. Soft skills are in great demand today and time management is one of the most important skills one needs to master for personal and professional success. In fact it requires time to master all other skills. Its tremendous value is felt but to manage one's time is not an easy task – it needs will and effort to do so. Students, the future professionals, can use a variety of strategies to manage their time for better results. This paper looks at how time plays an important role and suggests some feasible strategies like goal setting, prioritizing, being regular etc. for students to manage their time effectively in order to achieve success.

Patrick Forsyth says, "good, effective time management is a core skill, a career skill that we all need both to make us able to perform in a current job and to enhance our career prospects. It is a real differentiating factor...that gives you an edge on other people perhaps of equal ability, but who lack this aspect of self-organization and discipline." (page ix, preface)

One of the simple but effective methods is to prepare a 'to do' list i.e. write down all the things that need to be done to prepare for completing assignments, writing exams etc. This can



be further improved by listing these items in order of priorities. i.e. items A, B or C. The author of 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Steven Covey, states that the first generations of time management tools (notes, checklists, calendars and prioritization) are focused on those things that are urgent and reinforces the importance of **'putting first things first.'**

Steven Covey's TM Quadrants can be adopted by a student to help him/her manage time with respect to both personal and academic life as well.

Quadrant I is for the immediate and important deadlines e.g. submitting assignments in time, preparing for an exam which is scheduled for the next hour/day.

Quadrant II is applicable to long-term strategizing and development. For example, students need to revise and prepare for a test which is not in the near future. They can do this by designing an ongoing study programme which involves studying, revising on a daily basis which will increase their readiness to face a surprise test or a pre-scheduled exam with confidence.

Quadrant III can be understood in relation to 'time pressured distractions' which are not really important, but appear to be urgent. Often students are members of different Clubs in their colleges which require them to attend multiple meetings which can be time consuming and distract their attention from their regular academic activities such as having to submit an assignment in time. While it is essential for personal development to participate in extra or co-curricular activities, overindulgence and excessive time consumption in such activities may be detrimental to achieving academic goals. Therefore to increase productivity, a student needs to maintain a healthy balance between curricular and co-curricular activities

Quadrant IV pertains to those activities for which the output is of little value. These are diversions that are often used for taking a break from important and regular engagements/pursuits. Breaks are needed to reenergize one, however the problem arises when it involves over consumption of time and energy, thus defeating the purpose of taking time off. Examples of time wasters may include watching television or surfing the internet without purpose for hours, spending too much time on social media etc.

To help students to become more aware and alert about how thoughtful use of time can help them reach their goals, they can be asked to draw a pie chart depicting how they use time in 24 hours. They can make a note of the number of hours spent at college, eating, playing, with family and friends, watching TV, listening to music, browsing the internet, talking on the phone, texting etc. This will help to create awareness and facilitate making judgments regarding judicious use of time, keeping in mind sold time and soul/personal time. The time at college or work is sold time while the latter is the time that we use to learn, grow and become better versions of ourselves. While success is often linked with Doing it is also important to just BE. Soul time could include meditation, relaxation and rejuvenation for better productivity.

Though students know the value of academics, yet at times their long To Do lists leave little time to take care of themselves; at times there are some dry patches when they feel neither energized nor invigorated. Time management does not imply becoming an automaton. Rather, students need to stop rushing and find time to take care of themselves. They can energize themselves by taking time to smell the flowers, walk on the green grass i.e. appreciate and savor the beauty of nature.

They need to take time to be silent, to pray and meditate which boosts mental ability and improves concentration. Besides taking time to be with themselves it is important for them to stop, relax, forget about schedules and rather spend time with family and friends. They can replace their worries, cares and concerns with mindfulness and be alive to the present moment since life exists in the present. It is not always possible to take vacations to serene places, one just needs to imagine the peace and tranquillity of such places to soothe the mind and make it stress free.

In the 1930s, Woldemar Gerschler, a German coach helped runners to manage their time and accomplish more in a given stretch by breaking it down into chunks of running, followed by short breaks or intervals. This concept of interval training which belongs to the playing field has been applied in other areas as well due to the work of the behavioral scientist K. Anders Ericsson, who studied what separated great performers like artists, chess players etc. from others. He was of the opinion that anyone who invested 10,000-hours of practice could master anything. Interestingly it is not about how long one practiced but how

one practiced i.e. with full concentration and focus on high quality. Also these achievers seem to practice in comparatively small time spans of 60 to 90 minutes which is separated by short breaks. Such interval training prevents physical and mental fatigue and allows people to work more efficiently for a longer period of time.

The above principle can be applied to both teaching and learning activities. For example, students can be guided regarding how they can follow effective study methods, for e.g. instead of studying nonstop for three to four hours, a student would do well if he/she studies in chunks of 60 to 90 minutes separated by short breaks. These breaks could include any activity of the students' choice. It may even include taking a short power nap, when he is at home, which will ensure that he comes back refreshed and with better retention powers. Interestingly the same rule can be applied to teachers in the classroom. Instead of teaching nonstop for 60 minutes, a teacher would do well to plan the lesson such that well planned fillers are interspersed in-between the class at intervals. The teacher could involve the students in other enjoyable activities which could include asking brief questions regarding the portion of the lesson just completed or even involve the students in fun-filled but academic activities such as quizzes, riddles etc. pertinent to the relevant subject. In an English class, a teacher could use a variety of language items like vocabulary games, colour idioms, palindromes, tongue twisters etc. Such activities have the benefit of preventing students from being overloaded with information which could act as a barrier to reception of material. Interestingly, it also gives the teacher a breathing space; even a machine needs rest and oiling for optimum performance.

Time management is an important life skill that involves self discipline and shapes one's character. Peter Levin states that "strategic thinkers are alert" and "skilful time managers". They recognize and execute tasks which are of top priority whether they like them or not. At times students may not like a particular subject/topic but it is important for them to realize that life requires us to carry out our assigned tasks/duties/challenges even though we are not offered any options. This is a life lesson that students need to imbibe since people who are usually punctual are perceived as reliable, sincere and an asset to a team.

Those who have mastered time management know how to set and achieve smart goals (S-Strategic and specific, M-measurable, A-attainable, R-Realistic, Result based, T-Time bound). Being involved in too many activities and being unable to say "NO" to things which do not have top priority, hinder the achievement of goals. According to Peter Levin, "Strategic thinking cuts down stress." He states that when one takes 'a strategic approach they are much more in control, produce better work, and their frustration diminishes drastically.' Prioritizing involves making right judgments. A student needs to focus his time and energy on the "20 percent that matters" as per the Pareto Principle. He/she needs to identify and focus on what can be included in the 20 percent since it is this which will perhaps generate 80 percent of the results. Thus, it's critical that we identify and focus on those things.

To manage time better the student needs to be able to appreciate the importance of Quadrant II of Stephen Covey's Time management Matrix. Most engineering students aspire to be Civil servants, entrepreneurs or management professionals. It is admirable to have such goals however they cannot be achieved over night. Rather they demand much forethought and wise planning which include activities such as keeping oneself updated with current affairs, reading texts, acquiring a good command over language, inculcating leadership and team building qualities. Such goals should also include health and time for family and friends, all of which may not appear urgent but are very important.

In order to achieve their goals and make their dreams a reality, students can use a variety of strategies such as a maintaining a diary/ planner for each day, week, month, year or for longer term life goals, they would need to be able to say "no" to things which distract them from their goals, avoid procrastinating and time wasting activities, and finally having the ability to accomplish a task which has to be done - whether they have a liking for it or not. There is no single set plan that works for everyone. A student needs to chalk out a plan to manage his time in the best possible manner using an array of strategies that will help him to grow, keeping in mind those famous words that if one fails to plan he is planning to fail. However, it is important to be flexible for, as Covey points out a planning tool should be one's servant and not one's master. One needs to revisit the schedule regularly and make modifications where necessary. When there is a clash

between schedule and people, it needs to be borne in mind that schedules should be subordinated to people who matter in one's life.

Stress and time management are interlinked. A worried and exhausted mind can neither plan nor execute a task well. So one needs to find one's own mechanism such as music, gardening or reading to still the mind.

To master the art of aligning time management with goal setting, one needs to set realistic time management and organization plans which can improve productivity and the quality of life. It is not enough just to wish to succeed. One needs to have a burning desire to do so. It requires one to plan meticulously and be prepared even for the worst- for the times when one gets derailed. To combat with such situations it is necessary to reignite one's motivation.

However, these skills can be difficult to develop and maintain. One should reflect on the challenges that may be encountered on the path to achieving goals and create proactive responses to each possible challenge one may face. However, planning is not enough, it is imperative to actually implement these predetermined responses when encountered by challenges. When the goals are not only specific but also motivating, it is important to lay great emphasis on managing one's time and persevere till the goal is reached.

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