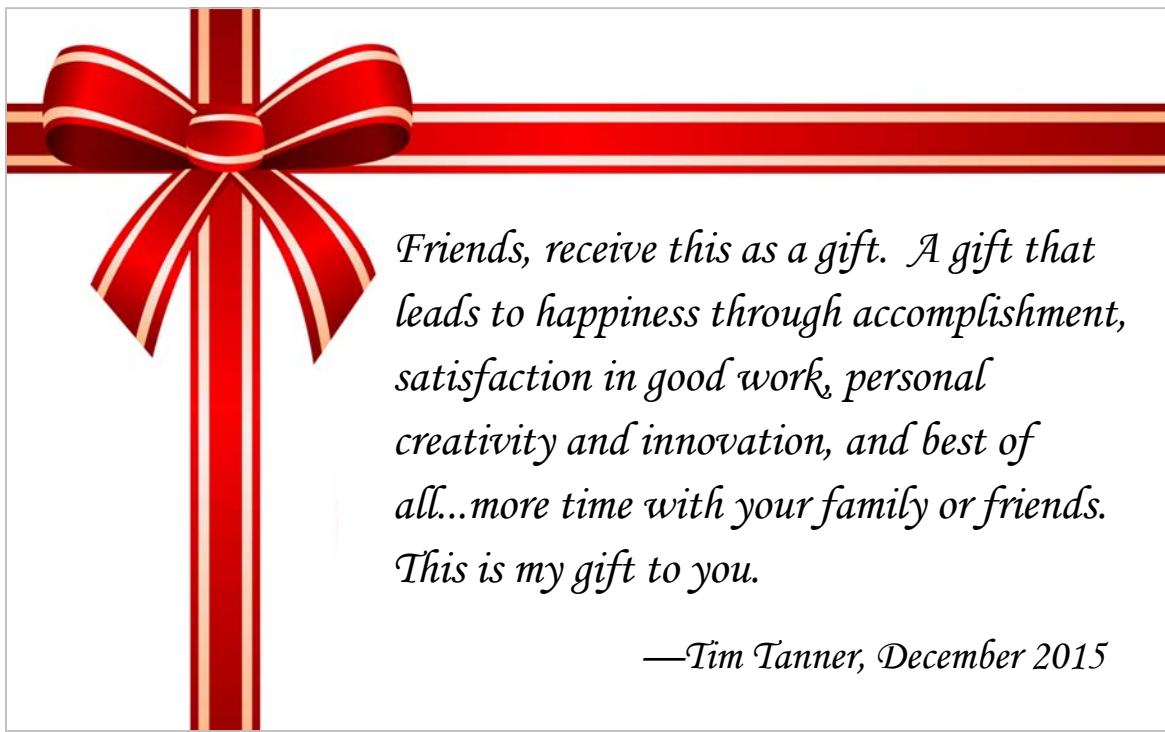


# Organizing Chaos:

## A Time Management Curriculum for Extension Professionals



*Friends, receive this as a gift. A gift that leads to happiness through accomplishment, satisfaction in good work, personal creativity and innovation, and best of all...more time with your family or friends. This is my gift to you.*

*—Tim Tanner, December 2015*

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# Organizing Chaos: A Time Management Curriculum for Extension Professionals

## About the Author:

**Tim Tanner** serves Ohio State University Extension as a County Director and 4-H (positive!) Youth Development Educator. He is regularly called upon to mentor new Extension professionals on work/family balance and time management strategies. Away from the office, Tim enjoys spending time with his family in the great outdoors.

## Permission:

Professionals are encouraged to use this curriculum resource and share their success/frustration feedback with the author at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

## APA Citation:

To cite this resource, here is the APA citation for your convenience:

Tanner, T. (2015). *Organizing chaos: A time management curriculum for extension professionals*. [Program of Studies]. Available from the website: <http://go.osu.edu/orgchaos>

## Welcome

This curriculum comes to you from an experienced Extension professional who knows the temptation of being all things to all people. Extension is a demanding career choice, but that does not mean it must feel overwhelming. If you have grown weary of working 60 hour weeks at the expense of your sanity, friends, or family, give this method a try. Let me know how it goes!

## Purpose

Organizing Chaos is exactly what it sounds like—a way for Extension professionals to organize the chaotic demands of a challenging career. It works under the assumption that professionals have a balanced job portfolio of teaching, research, and service. The main purpose is to set you up for continuing success in these areas while maintaining a 40 hour work week. Impossible? Try it out and see if it works for you!

## Learning Objectives

As a result of Organizing Chaos, Extension professionals will...

- ◆ Understand and appreciate the research connecting personal well-being, accomplishment, job-control, and client/employee satisfaction.
- ◆ Recognize the internal and external barriers to implementing sound time management principles.
- ◆ Possess a twelve segment time management philosophy to strengthen daily accomplishment.



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## Theoretical Framework

When are employees at their best? More specifically, when are employees satisfied with their jobs and clients satisfied with their work? Research from Robertson and Cooper (2011) suggests American employees are at their best when they possess high levels of personal well-being. This becomes difficult when paired with Seitel's (2009) analysis of the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce which depicted a steady decline in employee physical health and static, but low, scores in mental health. It is little surprise that job satisfaction declined from 61% to 49% in the two-decade period ending in 2006, a period corresponding to steady decline in national health values (Job satisfaction..., 2007).

To reverse these trends, it is imperative that employers focus efforts on the improvement of employee well-being. In his authoritative book on the subject, Seligman (2013) suggested that well-being has four "pillars:" meaning and purpose, positive emotions, relationships, and accomplishment. The first three pillars are organizational culture or competency factors over which employers produce some level of control and sustained improvement. The final pillar—accomplishment—places the onus on employees to make improvements. It is the focus of this curriculum.

In his text, Seligman suggested that for most individuals, work-based accomplishment is best derived from completing multiple smaller tasks. Though counterintuitive, this is verified by Verme's work on human satisfaction (2009) which demonstrated higher levels of freedom of choice/control corresponded to greater levels of satisfaction. In a sense, the more opportunities an employee has to feel accomplished, the greater the personal satisfaction and well-being. So what does this foretell for OSU Extension?

Ancient and modern religious scholars have long noted that an orderly approach to daily life—which produces ample opportunity for consciously and unconsciously noting accomplishment—creates greater human joy (Foster, 1988; MacDonald, 1985; Merton, 1949). If OSU Extension employees choose to order their daily work schedules with disciplined time management principles, greater well-being will similarly result. This improved well-being will create greater job and clientele satisfaction while promoting a more fertile environment for employee innovation.

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## Curriculum Philosophy

You are probably coming to this curriculum as a result of a crisis. Supervisor just gave you a poor review? New baby on the way? Too many nights spent checking work email? There are myriad crises which lead professionals to change, but whatever yours is remember this entire curriculum is based on choice. In order to perform better, spend more time with your family, etc. you must make a choice to work differently than you have in the past. The choices you make each day will build in critical mass toward greater accomplishment. And, as Verme noted in the theoretical framework, this greater sense of accomplishment and control will lead to improved job/life satisfaction.

## Special vs. Regular Days

So, enough with the macro, let's talk specifics. The first question you must ask each day is, "What kind of day is this?" If you are teaching in the community, convening a meeting, attending a professional in-



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service, etc. then the day is classified as a "special" day. Not because the day is universally wonderful, but because you will *not*

be employing time management techniques. Rather, your focus is to put your whole self into the event—be intentionally present and engaged. This will breed client and co-worker satisfaction which pays dividends for you and them. Here are a few tips for special days:

- ◆ Never check your email.
- ◆ Be conversational. Enjoy your colleagues.
- ◆ Leave your smartphone in the car.

So, let's say that an average week has two of these days. The other three days are yours to employ time management techniques. I call these the "regular" days. (Yes, a very creative naming strategy!) The regular days are the crux of this curriculum and you will find segment-by-segment descriptions ahead.

## Internal Barriers

Who will struggle with this? Everyone! No seriously, it is not easy to balance your workload. You never will perfect it, but this curriculum can make it better. But, because you want to know who will have the *most* difficulty with this, here are a few observations:

- ◆ Those who think they are great procrastinators.
- ◆ Those whose identity is wrapped up in being superwoman (e.g. working 60 hour weeks, attending *every* community meeting, etc.).
- ◆ Those who are satisfied with the words average, competent, or okay.
- ◆ Those who lack basic time management skills (e.g. maintaining a regular calendar).
- ◆ Those whose position requires tremendous regular interrupt-ability.
- ◆ Those who philosophically disagree with attaining job satisfaction.

## External Barriers

Even when you are fully onboard there will be challenges implementing this structure within your daily work life. Most of the common barriers can be overcome with retraining. Here are a few examples:

*Barrier: A client calls/visits the office at a bad time.*

Response: This is not a barrier, it is your job!

Engage fully but be assertive if he/she is a talker.

*Barrier: You are covering the office that day.*

Response: This is not a barrier, but gets qualified as a "special" day. Therefore, any "regular" work you get done is truly a bonus.

*Barrier: Telemarketer phone calls.*

Response: Train your Office Associate to screen more effectively...telemarketers should never get beyond the front desk.

*Barrier: Interruptions from your intra-office staff.*

Response: Adopt the "office door philosophy" as described on the next page.





## MAJOR TIME SAVERS

*It would not matter how well you adhered to Organized Chaos, if you do not set yourself up for success with your yearly calendar and office arrangements. Here are three major time savers that will create a regular environment for your success.*

### SCAFFOLDING SPECIAL DAYS

As you build the yearly schedule of activities, events, trainings, meetings, etc. in your program area, remember that special days are precious. The more of them you have, the less balanced you become. Therefore, be sure to scaffold events whenever possible. Put meetings from varying committees back-to-back on the same night. Offer an event on the same night you are already in Columbus for a half-day meeting. Remember, only you can be an advocate for your sanity—particularly as it relates to nights and weekends.

This is probably the best time to mention how many nights and weekends you should be working. Less than you are now! By adopting the strategy outlined above, you should be able to work a maximum of two nights per week or one night on the weeks you also have a Saturday or Sunday event. Obviously, exceptions are appropriately made for mega-conferences, camps, fairs, etc.

### OFFICE DOOR PHILOSOPHY

At your next office conference, let your colleagues know that you are adopting a “read my door” philosophy as it relates to their interaction with you. (Those with cubicles will need a more creative solution!) This philosophy is pretty simple...

Open Door: I am available.

Door Cracked: Important matters only please.

Door Closed: Do not bother me unless the building is on fire!

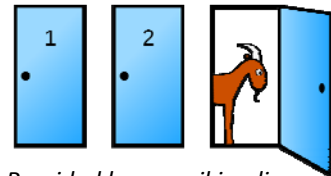
Of course, be sure to keep your door open/cracked the majority of the time. Closed doors should be saved for your most important tasks.

## OFFICE ASSOCIATE TRAINING

As discussed in external barriers, the Office Associate plays a huge role in office time management. It is essential that you work with him/her to clearly understand your phone preferences. Here are several parameters I use to improve efficiency *without* reducing client satisfaction:

1. Create a single after-hours voice mail box for the entire office rather than each person. This ensures the Office Associate will collect all messages and only pass on those that actually pertain to your role.
2. Train the OA to politely ask “may I have your name and reason for calling” even if the caller starts the exchange with, “Hi, is {your name} available?” This allows the OA to triage all registration, telemarketer, and easy calls.
3. Related to #2, if you see seasonal patterns emerging (e.g.—tomato blight, Asian lady beetles, camp registrations) make sure your OA has the fact sheet, forms, etc. needed to triage all incoming calls related to that subject. It is your responsibility to empower your OA to discharge his/her duties effectively.
4. If you are working on a “door closed” project, ask your OA to hold your calls to a specific time and provide clear instructions for when you plan to get back in touch with clientele. In busy offices, you may even set up timed appointments during your next available “my county” time—which will be discussed in segment #1. Use sparingly.

Never forget that we are a service organization and serving client needs is our first priority. In the era of Google, response time is a critical factor in whether clientele utilize Extension or another provider/source. Find the right balance for your office/setting and always maintain excellent communications with your Office Associate. No one Provided by: en.wikipedia.org in the organization is as important to your success as they are. No one!



## The Twelve Daily Segments

Now that your annual calendar is more reasonably arranged and office parameters set, it is time to get down to fixing the “you” part of this whole thing. The rest of this curriculum focuses on the twelve daily segments you will employ to strengthen your sense of accomplishment/well-being on regular work days. After briefly discussing them below, each one will be more covered in more depth in a corresponding lesson. For visual learners, be sure to check out the appendices for calendaring tips and more at the end of the packet. [Note: the segments are listed in the order you should employ them daily. This will create a healthy rhythm. Try it for a month before adjusting to your whimsies.] Enjoy the fun titles!



### #1: My County ‘Tis of Thee

Serving your clientele needs must come first. So, spend your first hour focusing only on local needs. This may involve returning phone calls but should not involve email.

### #2: Leaders are Writers

Build your creative works portfolio during this time. Fact sheets, journal articles, and curriculum are typical options. Do not use this time for less valued writing (e.g.--news releases, brochures, newsletters).

### #3: Happy Hour

Actually just 20 minutes a day of using feng shui organization principles in your office. May also include reporting, filing, and system back-up.

### #4: E-triage

First time you should open email each day. Delete, sort, and respond to pertinent requests.

### #5: Socio-lunchy

Invest in your intra-office colleagues, attend community luncheons, etc. but make sure you are not regularly eating behind your computer!

### #6: Administrivia

So much to do so little time! Most of these activities become more bearable if completed a little each day. County director duties, evaluations, news articles, and intra-office colleague projects fit in here.

### #7: At Your Service

From busy work you didn’t want to do ^^^ to work you have chosen to do! In this segment, get to work on grant writing, state team work, peer editing/ reviewing, and similar efforts.

### #8: Air Break

Step outside for some fresh air during what is generally the nicest, warmest part of the day. Take a walk, smell the roses, and leave your cares behind for at least ten minutes.

### #9: Leaders are Readers

Perhaps the most overlooked part of our jobs. Mix in reading which benefits your county as well as your personal improvement. Have a system for retaining the best quotes, paragraphs, or snippets you glean from each source.

### #10: Home Away from Home

Mixing in a few minutes of “home” work helps to mentally counteract all of the times this happens in reverse. Balance your checkbook, run simple errands, schedule medical appointments, etc. so your time at home can be spent more substantively.

### #11: E-wrap

Clean out your daily inbox and close it down until tomorrow. Do not check email at night!

### #12: Livin’ the Dream

End your day with optimism by working hard on projects that matter. This may be a local or state effort, it may be writing or brainstorming, it may be solo or team. What is most important is that it has a creative, problem solving bent. Then go home and leave work with a sense of accomplishment!



## General Timing Principles

Based on your position, family life, and circadian rhythms, you will discover the order of these segments that works best for you. If you are not an educator, the segments will necessarily be re-titled to better coincide with your job description. Nevertheless, be sure to keep the following key principles in mind:

- ◆ Save the groggiest times of the day for your least creative work.
- ◆ Bounce back and forth between active and passive formats which employ different parts of your brain.
- ◆ Don't neglect the breaks and social opportunities.
- ◆ Keep wellness high on your priority list!
- ◆ Start the day with your most important and end the day with your most enjoyable task.

## Critiques of *Organized Chaos*

**Critique:** This seems rather focused on state and professional work. Shouldn't most of our time be devoted to local concerns?

**Response:** Remember, organized days only apply to in-office, regular work days. Your county teaching and events are not represented here because they occur on special days.

**Critique:** I would rather finish a big project all in one day rather than in smaller increments over a number of days.

**Response:** I used to think that was fine, now I view that as less quality work. When you marinate over a subject for several days or weeks, the product is inevitably more refined.

**Critique:** How do you feel accomplished if you are always leaving projects open-ended?

**Response:** You will complete so many more small tasks than before! This generates a tremendous psychological boost.

**Critique:** In a previous presentation, you emphasized finding Czikszentmihalyi's "flow" at work. Doesn't this segmentation ruin that possibility?

**Response:** On the contrary. Having this level of organization provides a fertile field and sense of freedom for your mind. Your subconscious will intuit when you can enter into a state of flow and when you need to move on to more timely work.

**Critique:** You mentioned that adults will probably only undertake this if a crisis or incentive serves as the impetus for change. What if I haven't felt that but still want to try organizing my chaos?

**Response:** Research suggests you may have a difficult time exacting the level of discipline required to adopt this framework. Yet, any person who wishes to make a change in their lives can do so when willing to take the first step. Best of luck!

## Additional Readings

The knowledge base for professional time management is limitless, but wellness-oriented works are more difficult to find. Several authors who have shaped my macro and micro understandings re: "the meaning of life and work" are presented in Appendix D.

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*Date Created: December 2015*

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# Organizing Chaos

## #1: My County 'Tis of Thee

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

~Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 1989

### Acceptable Activities

Responding to client needs  
Preparing lesson plans  
Intra-office collaboration  
County project and event work

### Time Devoted Daily

60 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

9-10a

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

The modern county Extension professional is pulled in multiple directions in the workplace. Pressures of county clients and government officials are subtle while the demands of colleagues, advancement, and supervisors are more prominent. Sometimes it is easy to forget that the county-based work is our reason for existence. To alleviate this possibility, you will give your best energy of each day to this time segment. The recommendation is that you will come into the office and spend your first hour on these tasks.

### Segment Objective

Professionals will work on the most pressing county-based needs during this time segment. This will commonly include client call backs, preparing lesson plans, event preparation, and intra-office collaborative project work.

### Activity to Get You Going

Grab your annual program calendar and check out what activities/events you will teach/lead in the next four weeks. Make a list of the components necessary to accomplish each event and put a self-due date next to them. Then organize the list by due date in ascending order. (Tip: Using MS Excel and its sort feature is beneficial for those who prefer a computer-based approach.) Finally, begin working on the list in order of



Source: en.wikipedia.org

—continued—



*The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.*

~Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 1989

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Ask your Office Associate to stagger non-essential call backs during this time.
2. Delegate routine or repetitive county-based work to subordinate staff.
3. If a seasonal issue is generating several client phone calls, provide a standardized response your Office Associate can give to clientele.
4. Keep accurate electronic files of regular county work to limit year-to-year duplication of efforts.
5. As you learn who your long-winded clientele are within the county, provide a list to your Office Associate such that he/she can appropriately deflect such callers to a scheduled call-back appointment of 15 minutes or less.

## Barriers to Implementation

**Historic Expectations**—the previous individual holding your position loved to sit around the office talking, visit farms/clubs to hang out, etc. thereby making it more difficult to establish a professionalized client triage system

**Unprofessional Office Associate**—your OA is incapable of implementing a professionalized client triage system or your county finances are unable to afford suitable office support

**Office Location**—your office is in a main public building which encourages more clientele “dropping by to chat” rather than visiting when legitimate needs exist; relationships are essential to our work but this is not how they are best built

**The Morning Coffee Club**—hourly office staff sometimes enjoy starting the day socially and may expect you to join in the conversation when you arrive; tip: a strong office staff should socialize together at the day’s mid-point when a collective re-charge is physiologically necessary

## Getting Ahead

There will be (rare!) days in which pressing county needs are less evident. On these days, work ahead on some of these projects which will come due soon enough:

- ◆ Lesson plan preparation for distant events
- ◆ Anticipate the next “seasonal” need and prepare the necessary materials for your Office Associate to triage/respond
- ◆ Self-critique one of your well-worn teaching topics/lessons to find new resources, additions, subtractions, etc.

Note: It is not appropriate to skip ahead to segment #2 when work is light in *My County 'Tis of Thee*.

## Citation

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# Organizing Chaos

## #2: Leaders are Writers

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor...It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life, and it is the main obstacle between you and a...first draft.

~Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, 1994

### Acceptable Activities

Project books/fact sheets  
 Blog posts (if substantive)  
 Formal curricula  
 Scholarly presentations/posters  
 Journal articles

### Time Devoted Daily

60 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

10-11a

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

The modern county Extension professional is expected to contribute creative and scholarly work. This work is no longer considered an “extra,” so regular attention is a must. Since this is the second most important work you do each day, the recommendation is that you will complete this segment while the morning energy level remains sufficient.

### Segment Objective

Professionals will work on the most timely writing-based needs during this time segment. This will commonly include fact sheets, presentations, and journal articles. Less valued writing such as press releases, brochures, web editing, and newsletters should not be worked on during this time segment.

### Activity to Get You Going

The most difficult part of writing is the self-discipline to do it regularly. Putting thoughts to paper has an air of permanence which allows for judgment—by yourself and others. Don't be so hard on yourself! As the Anne Lamott quote indicates, crappy first drafts lead to better second drafts which lead to quality published works. So write about what you know or what you want to fix. Do it every day, even if you only start off at 20 minutes. The discipline will magnify tenfold and your passion for writing will follow.



Source: en.wikipedia.org

—continued—



*Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor...It will keep you cramped...and it is the main obstacle between you and a...first draft.*

~Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, 1994

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Your Office Associate should hold your calls and non-necessary walk-ins during this time.
2. Good writing is about devoting time to writing, not trying to save time by getting it perfect the first time through. Keep multiple writing projects/types at hand so you can pick the one that calls to you on a particular morning.
3. Almost all good writers start with pad n' pencil. Even if it is a simple outline, this will keep you from becoming perfectionistic too early in the writing process. Don't listen to the time management voice that suggests this is performing needless double-work.
4. If you find it difficult to write when your office is messy, just remember that the next segment can be a cleaning time. Cleaning can wait.
5. On the really bad days or days you must allow for distractions, perform editing work.

## Barriers to Implementation

**Nothing to Write**—the myth that you are not an expert at anything, do not wish to solve an issue, or are not worthy of publishing on a topic

**Writer's Block**—the fictitious phenomenon where you sit in front of the computer and “the words do not materialize;” tip: in these circumstances you just have to burp out your main ideas and refine another day

**Noise Distractions**—your office is a busy and/or noisy place which makes you lose your train of thought; tip: a cracked door, silenced phone, or light classical music often help

## Getting Ahead

As busy professionals, it is easy to settle for the mid-level writing forms (e.g.—posters, presentations, blog posts) at the expense of more substantive works. Therefore, on the abnormal occasion where you are between projects or are awaiting research data to continue writing, pull out some of your old mid-level writing forms and see if there is one you could repurpose into a more impressive scholarly work. It is not appropriate to skip ahead to segment #3 when work is light here; otherwise, you will do that almost every day!

## Citation

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# Organizing Chaos

## #3: Happy Hour

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

Now imagine yourself living in a space that contains only things that spark joy. Isn't that the lifestyle you dream of?

~Marie Kondo, *The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*, 2010

### Acceptable Activities

- File management
- General office cleaning
- Organizing desk/shelves
- Regular computer file back-up
- Office mailbox checking

### Time Devoted Daily

20 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

11:10-11:30a

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

Rather than drowning your sorrows as this title would suggest, the *Happy Hour* segment produces a wonderful spark in your day. It is a chance to get up and get moving while you clean or organize your office space. The physical nature of this effort generates key physiological benefits and the lessening of clutter produces the well known benefits of feng shui. Since this is only a 20 minute commitment each day, there is never a reason to skip this segment. It should be just the right amount of time.

### Segment Objective

Professionals will get up and get moving to organize their work space which produces multiple physiological benefits. Activities will commonly include work associated with filing cabinets, shelves, mailboxes, and the desk space. Save the organization of your email/calendar for the next segment or segment #11.

### Activity to Get You Going

Getting your "house in order" is food for the soul. It is not beneath your dignity or something to be neglected. To start, work on your desk space because that is what impacts you the most. After your desk feels good (which may take several days!) move to your guest spaces, shelves, and files. Before you know it, your workspace will invite you into good work each morning.



Source: en.wikipedia.org

—continued—





*Now imagine yourself living in a space that contains only things that spark joy. Isn't that the lifestyle you dream of?*

*~Marie Kondo, The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up, 2010*

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Don't make a mess in the first place. Eating lunch in a common room is a great start. Never drinking coffee or soda is another.
2. Only maintain the minimal level of paperwork in your filing cabinets. If electronic storage is permissible, choose it.
3. THIS is the time for your Pandora music. Get it out of your system now so you can focus when it matters most.
4. Assuming you have limited storage within your office, convince your county director to purchase off-site storage space. That is where all of your "record retention" items go.
5. Clean without the use of hazardous chemicals. A cleaner office isn't a productive workspace if you have to let it air out for an hour.

## Barriers to Implementation

**The Helpful Janitor**—in some offices the janitor always seems to be lurking about waiting for someone to encroach upon his/her turf

**More Pressing Matters**—"They don't pay me to clean my office...I have more important things to work on today!" Folks, I have visited Extension offices with live mouse nests in desk drawers and stacks of paper so high that no guests could possibly visit—that is not the way of a professional

**Desire to Look Busy**—some commissioners look poorly upon offices that are so tidy it appears little business is conducted within, thereby giving you a 'justified' excuse for your hoarding and slobery

## Getting Ahead

If you walked out of your office at the end of today for the very last time, what would the next person find? Hopefully a little dust and a misplaced rubber band or two. Is that too high of a standard for Extension professionals who are constantly toting teaching materials from here to there and back? Yes. But that is why this segment exists, to prevent things from getting too out of control!

As you make your space welcoming for you and your guests, it is very unlikely you'll ever have the office in utopian shape. Therefore, it is not appropriate to skip ahead to segment #4; else you will soon be mega cleaning just once a year—the ultimate symptom of a disorganized professional.

## Citation

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# Organizing Chaos

## #4: E-triage

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

Multitasking creates a dopamine-addiction feedback loop, effectively rewarding the brain for losing focus and for constantly searching for external stimulation. To make matters worse, the prefrontal cortex has a novelty bias, meaning that its attention can be easily hijacked by something new—the proverbial “shiny objects.”

~Daniel J. Levitin, *The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload*, 2014

### Acceptable Activities

- Respond to emails
- Send thoughtful emails
- Sort, delete, filter emails
- Check favored websites

### Time Devoted Daily

30 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

11:30a-NOON

### Introduction

Triage is a term common to hospital emergency rooms. In that setting a doctor assess what components of the patient’s calamities receive immediate treatment and what items can wait for later. Triageing your email follows the same course. During this 30 minute segment, you will thoughtfully respond to the most pertinent emails in your inbox and leave the rest for segment #11. By waiting until this time of day to work through your email stack, the majority of the important requests have already arrived. In the rare circumstance when you filter through with time to spare, begin the deleting and filing phase. Lunch is a powerful motivator, so this will probably be your fastest 30 minutes of the day!

### Segment Objective

Professionals will thoughtfully respond to emails and send requests of their own. They may also delete, filter, or check key websites as time permits, but not at the expense of thoughtful response.

### Activity to Get You Going

Checking email comes second nature to most of us. Checking it properly is a learned behavior. Start by training your eyes to look through the entire list of newly received emails to get a quick estimate of how many might be important. Then start from the *bottom* of the new list (i.e.— items probably sent at 5 or 6p yesterday) and work your way up. Sub-file and delete as you go, if time permits.



Source: flickr.com

—continued—



*...prefrontal cortex has a novelty bias, meaning that its attention can be easily hijacked by something new—the proverbial “shiny objects.”*

~Daniel J. Levitin, *The Organized Mind*, 2014

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Write emails of substance so the respondent only needs to respond once. Do not treat email as a chat mechanism—that is laziness.
2. Sub-file every email that is “closed.” Delete every email that is nonsense or advertising.
3. Adopt an email sub-filing system that closely mirrors your other filing systems.
4. Work hard to keep your inbox below 50 items by the end of the day.
5. Use a secondary email address for all non-work related email such as online shopping, social media updates, etc. This will greatly reduce your work related email clutter and you can still check that secondary account once a week to see if anything useful arrived.
6. Do not email about controversial items. Using the phone now may prevent a time-destroying public records request or court case later!
7. Ensure the content of your email is clear. Stay away from colloquial phrases, ALL CAPS, and tones that could be construed as hostile. If you cannot be kind, step away from the computer.

## Barriers to Implementation

**Instant Message Emailers**—some colleagues and clientele treat email like an instant messaging service and hope to engage you in dialogue throughout the day; tip: if it takes a second email just use the phone

**Fear of Missing Something**—the mythical notion that by not checking email at night or first thing in the morning you will miss something important; my experience has been that this only burned me one time is seven years...so lose the fear folks!

## Getting Ahead

The reward for efficiently managing your email is a few minutes checking websites you enjoy before the lunch break. Though this only happens once or twice a week, that’s reason enough to get ahead, right?!

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# Organizing Chaos

## #5: Socio-lunchy

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas, they exchange images.

~Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 1985

### Acceptable Activities

- Eating lunch
- Socializing with co-workers
- Reading the local newspaper
- Take a refreshing stroll outside

### Time Devoted Daily

- 40 minutes eating & socializing
- 20 minutes prep/clean/restroom

### Suggested Time of Day

12:10-12:50p

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

With so much to do, the “working lunch” has become the norm in white collar America. In fact, recent surveys suggest that more than half of us eat most lunches at our desks<sup>1</sup>. Since everyone else is doing it, you may be wondering why a more social approach is warranted. Two reasons. First, this is your only regular social opportunity with your co-workers. Filtering conversations to this time of the day is physiologically appropriate and efficient. Having adequate relationships with your co-workers is essential. Second, we are research based educators, right? A recent MIT study suggests your overall productivity improves by 10 percent when you step away from your desk and eat a social lunch with your peers<sup>2</sup>. Dry rubs up!

### Segment Objective

Professionals will leave their personal offices and eat at a central office lunch table or (occasionally) off-site at a local restaurant. They will use this time to dine and socialize.

### Activity to Get You Going

If not already a tradition in your locale, start simple by encouraging one day each week at a central lunch table. Your co-workers will learn this is *the* time they can socialize with you. On days when no one shows, read the local newspaper or just relax. Getting out of your office is paramount.



Source: commons.wikipedia.org

—continued—



*Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other.  
They do not exchange ideas, they exchange images.*

~Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 1985

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Lunch with co-workers becomes a drag when it turns into an entire production of ordering out, giving one person the money, waiting for the food to arrive, sorting the food... It will work much better if you do this only once a week, with Fridays being a prime option.
2. Pack your lunch. See #1.

## Barriers to Implementation

**Bringing Home to Work**—in some offices there are staff members who exercise poor filtering of their home lives which leads to inappropriate conversations around the lunch table; tip: the county director must address this quickly and tactfully so the lunch room doesn't permanently clear out

**Poor Eating Habits**—some employees eat poorly (e.g.—fast food every day, Lunchables) which creates a judgmental social dynamic in the lunchroom

**The Teachers' Lunchroom**—when conversations turn catty, gossipy, or conspiratorial instead of focusing on the depth of the present employees

**The Morning Coffee Club**—hourly office staff sometimes enjoy starting the day socially which leads to a later start time and irregular lunch hour; tip: get them to eat lunch together instead...when a collective re-charge is physiologically necessary

**Smartphones**—when co-workers bring these mini-computers to the lunch table to meet their insatiable need for connection with anyone but you

**"I'll Take a Fast Lunch and Go Home Early"**—fools gold which leads to poor health and weakened relationships

## Getting Ahead

Eating on the run or at your desk may create modest short-term gains, but in the long-run your productivity weakens and intra-office relationships suffer. Don't fall for the fools gold.

## References

<sup>1</sup>47 Percent of workers who almost always leave their desk for lunch. [Brief article]. (January 01, 2011). *Shape*, 30, 6.

<sup>2</sup>Pentland, A., & Heibeck, T. (2008). *Honest signals: How they shape our world*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

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# Organizing Chaos

## #6: Administrivia

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.

~Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*, 1902

### Acceptable Activities

- County director duties
- Government/donor reporting
- Program reporting (e.g.—RIV)
- Less valued writing or preparing
- Conference calls
- Thank you cards
- Program evaluation analysis

### Time Devoted Daily

20 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

1:00-1:20p

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

Though calling this section “gouging your eyes out with ice picks” seemed the most honest, I have taken this title and spirit from former director of OSU Extension Dr. Keith Smith. He verbally loathed administrative work but was always quick to point out its essential nature. Given the endlessly increasing burden of administrative work in our risk management, fiscal policy, and performance review arenas, Extension employees won’t last long if they shirk administrative duties. Even if you do not have a formal administrative title, this work is key to showcasing your professionalism and maintaining good partners in the community. Those are reasons enough to give it your attention.

### Segment Objective

Professionals will complete timely administrative tasks during this “mind fog” time of the day. On occasions when evaluation, reporting, or government relations work is lacking, this time may be spent on the less valued forms of writing.

### Activity to Get You Going

Probably more than any other segment, this is where you rely on your weekly calendar to keep you on track. See what the next item on the list is and get it done. Also pay special attention to items that require feedback from others and make those requests early.



Source: commons.wikipedia.org

—continued—



*I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.*

— Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*, 1902

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Many administrative projects require feedback from others prior to being fully able to check them off your list. Make these requests early so your efficiency is maintained.
2. Work closely with your Office Associate to discover what administrative tasks you can safely and fairly delegate to him/her.
3. A lot of our work on state teams or with community partners ends up falling into the administrative or service components. So, if you have the power to sway the group, get those conference calls scheduled during this time block or over lunch so your general daily schedule remains mostly unaffected.

## Barriers to Implementation

**Poor Office Support**—the situation where your office support is lacking in hours or competencies that would take routine administrative tasks off your plate; this also occurs when the person is unable or to conceptualize the role of an executive assistant (which is actually far more empowering)

**Can't Organize Your Life in General**—some employees are lucky to find their ways through the office door each morning so performing administrative work is a big ask

**Extension's Ethic of Procrastination**—endemic to our system is an ethic of procrastination born of diligent employees who have turned projects in early only to have the project format/timeline/etc. altered

**The Mountain Becomes an Avalanche**—particularly with items like annual reporting, professionals often wait until the very last minute hoping they will be offered a miracle reprieve

## Getting Ahead

Particularly in the summer months when central administration makes very few requests of county professionals, you may find no administrative tasks on your to do list. In this circumstance, consider the following options before skipping to segment #7:

- ◆ If you are the county director, check in with your subordinate staff to see how their annual goals are progressing.
- ◆ Begin collating impact statements for your year-end report or (if applicable) more regular reports to your county commissioners.
- ◆ Read a neighboring county's newsletter to glean useful shards you can re-purpose with their permission.

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# Organizing Chaos

## #7: At Your Service

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

...I offer no apology only this plea: When I am frayed and strained and drizzle at the end, please someone cut a square and put me in a quilt, that I might keep some child warm...

~Nikki Giovanni, excerpt of the poem "Quilts", 2002

### Acceptable Activities

Grant writing  
State team efforts  
Conference planning  
Peer reviewing/editing

### Time Devoted Daily

30 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

1:20-1:50p

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

As an employee who wishes to regularly exceed expectations, dedicating time to professional service is paramount. We all have something to offer in service to others, but most of us lack the time. Giving it a segment keeps it in focus.

This segment is perhaps the most seasonal of all the segments. For example, if you are a 4-H professional service may be quite barren in the summer months. Flexibility is fine but don't stay away too long!

### Segment Objective

Professionals will advance the interests of OSU Extension and/or their communities through professional service. This may include such items as team work, event planning, editing, and grant writing—so long as the efforts related to serving the organization or a society.

### Activity to Get You Going

The Giovanni poem is the perfect metaphor for this segment. Our organization is a quilt and our individual efforts are the pieces which make it whole. Sometimes we offer a large centerpiece while other times we contribute a mere sliver. Yet everyone's efforts make the quilt whole. To get started, find a colleague that loves what you love and write a grant together. Respond to a request for help. Building your network will make this flourish!



Source: [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

—continued—



...please someone cut a square and put me in a quilt,  
that I might keep some child warm...

— Nikki Giovanni, excerpt from the poem *Quilts*, 2002

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Break your service commitments into three types: required, desired, and retired. If a form of service is required, give it your attention but limited creativity. If a form of service is desired, give it your highest attention and creativity. If a form of service should be retired, shape the group or move on to something more productive.
2. Write grants that will lead to more than just money. They should lead toward curricula, research briefs, etc. so you are not constantly dealing with “one off” situations.
3. If you are in leadership for a conference or event, ensure you have an opportunity to teach as well. (This won’t always be possible but is a good tip to keep in mind.)
4. You may be able to “kill two birds with one stone” by having service-group conference calls over the lunch hour.

## Barriers to Implementation

**Comfort with Meeting Expectations**—the situation where you have already accomplished a tremendous amount by lunch time and fail to pursue the work segments which breed excellence

**Dysfunctional or Legacy Teams**—some opportunities for service are led by those with a more passive agenda; tip: invest primarily in teams that match your energy, specialization, or interest

**Failing to Plan on a Yearly Basis**—many service opportunities (e.g.—grants, calls for proposal) happen annually with routine deadlines yet some professionals claim they had little notice to submit an entry; tip: if your yearly calendar includes common service deadlines this should be ameliorated

## Getting Ahead

Particularly in the summer months when service opportunities dwindle, you may find your to do list lacking. In this circumstance, consider the following option before skipping to segment #8:

- ◆ Check your yearly service opportunity calendar and complete all the easy parts of a grant or presentation proposal

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# Organizing Chaos

## #8: Air Break

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

Many of us have made our world so familiar that we do not see it anymore. An interesting question to ask yourself at night is, What did I really see this day?

~John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*, 1996

### Acceptable Activities

Go outside for a walk  
Combine with #9 and visit a park  
Take trash out to the dumpster

### Time Devoted Daily

20 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

1:50-2:10p

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

We interrupt your regularly scheduled program for an announcement: go outside! [And leave that mini-computer—the smartphone—inside.]

### Segment Objective

Professionals will improve their physiological well-being, attention skills, and general productivity by taking a 20 minute break outside. This might include a walk, working in the office garden, or reading at a park (in combination with segment #9). For an added benefit, go with a colleague when possible.

### Activity to Get You Going

In this case, a picture is worth a thousand words...



Provided by the author ~ A short stroll from the Laramie, WY Extension office

—continued—





*Many of us have made our world so familiar that we do not see it anymore. An interesting question to ask yourself at night is, What did I really see this day?*

— John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*, 1996

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Could be combined with #9 such that you do some reading outdoors at a nearby park. Just make sure you don't spend the entire time sitting. Walking slowly while reading is surprisingly effective for the sure footed.

## Barriers to Implementation

**Lack of Office Staff**—in small offices you may be the only one available to cover the phones or walk-in clientele

**Perception of Tobacco Use**—"the only people that go outside in this weather are smokers!"; tip: tactfully share why you are stepping outside...soon your co-workers will see the extra spark in *your* afternoon and will come outside with you

**Aren't I On the Clock?**—note: the University supports your reasonably wellness pursuits on company time—just remember, you could be outside smoking every hour and the U would much prefer your time spent this way

## Getting Ahead

If you have a guilt problem with stepping away for a few minutes, make it practical. Work in the outdoor office garden (or create one!), take trash out to the dumpster, or find another way to feel good about leaving your office.

## Citation

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# Organizing Chaos

## #9: Leaders are Readers

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

The best thing about graduating from the university was that I finally had time to sit on a log and read a good book.

~Edward Abbey, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 1989

### Acceptable Activities

Beneficial reading from:

- Fact sheets/project books
- Journal articles
- Blog posts/newsletters
- Books

Systematic collating of good snippets from these readings

### Time Devoted Daily

50 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

2:10-3:00p

### Permission

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### Introduction

The 33rd President of the United States Harry Truman once shared this nice little play on words: “Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers.” Think about it. How many opportunities do you have for professional growth? Conferences? Probably less than five days per year. Reading is the regular format for professional growth accessible as the nearest library. By reading a variety of subjects that relate to your position, specialization, or even general interest, your mind will grow sharper and innovation will flourish. Listen to the President, if you want to be a leader, you’ve got to be a reader.

### Segment Objective

Professionals will become more innovative and strengthen county programming through regular reading. This reading may include online or written works, but they should be job or personal development related. Time may also be spent systematically documenting/collating beneficial snippets from texts as they are read.

### Activity to Get You Going

Since reading a book chapter or full journal article may feel overwhelming in the beginning, try out some favored blog posts, the newsletters of other county educators, or a fact sheet. Be sure to collect useful snippets along the way for later professional use.



Source: commons.wikimedia.org

—continued—



*The best thing about graduating from the university was that I finally had time to sit on a log and read a good book.*

— Edward Abbey, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 1989

## Time Saving Techniques

1. If you haven't done much reading for awhile, start with lighter efforts like news articles, blog posts, or fact sheets. As you build up a reading stamina, books and journal articles will become more accessible to you.
2. Create a system for documenting useful quotes, ideas, paragraphs, etc. Circle or note these items as you go along, but do not interrupt reading to enter them into your system—wait until the final ten minutes.
3. If your mind is wandering rather than ingesting the words on the page, read while standing up or outside in the fresh air.
4. This may be the best segment to crack your office door to limit distractions.

## Barriers to Implementation

**More Pressing Matters**—"They don't pay me to read books...I have more important things to work on today!" This is a common refrain among individuals in short-staffed offices or for whom continuing education seems nonsensical

**Desire to Look Busy**—some county directors or commissioners look poorly upon workers who are reading, particularly if the reading posture conveys a lazy appearance

**Very Loud or Distracting Office**—it can be difficult to focus on reading when the office features a cubicle set-up or background music is socially acceptable; tip: advocate for your ability to concentrate or physically move to a more beneficial space when it is time to read

## Getting Ahead

Particularly in your busier seasons, reading is easy to put on the backburner. Avoid the temptation to ditch it entirely by reducing the segment time to 20 minutes instead. This not only keeps your mind engaged year-round but also provides a healthy escape from the programs occupying so much of your time.

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# Organizing Chaos

## #10: Home Away from Home

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

When your mind is preoccupied, your impulses—not your long-term goals—will guide your choices.

~Kelly McGonigal, *The Willpower Instinct*, 2011

### Acceptable Activities

- Pay the bills
- Balance your checkbook
- Schedule medical appointments
- Run simple errands
- Review your child's homework
- Declutter your car/car trunk
- Update your family's shared calendar

### Time Devoted Daily

30 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

3:00-3:30p

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

By the time you get home, check the mail, eat supper, clean up supper, and change into your comfy clothes, there isn't much time left before bed is there? On top of that, weekends are often busy with social, religious, shopping, or family affairs. So, when do you ever have time to do the little things that make a household run smoothly?

Beyond that, Extension is a particularly challenging workplace because of evening and weekend teaching requirements. On weeks with multiple night programs, staying above water is a challenge all by itself. Spending a few minutes during the workday accomplishing simple home-front tasks will smooth out these rough edges in your life.

### Segment Objective

Professionals will ensure their home life receives proper attention by accomplishing simple "home economy" tasks during the workday. Though brief, these little accomplishments will smooth out the rough edges associated with so many evening and weekend duties.

### Activity to Get You Going

Pick the three things you regularly neglect at home and place them on this segment's schedule for the first week. Did you notice the mental benefit of reducing that stress in your life? Then add others as they arise.



Source: flickr.com

—continued—



*When your mind is preoccupied, your impulses—rather than your long-term goals—will guide your choices.*

— Kelly McGonigal, *The Willpower Instinct*, 2011

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Do the same kinds of activities on the same day.  
Example: an entire 30 minutes of setting up your next car, vision, dental, and medical appointments will engender a tremendous sense of accomplishment. (Particularly because appointments are nearly impossible to set-up during the evening hours.)
2. Unless you are in the middle of a family emergency, let your family know this is the preferred time window if they want to call/text you. This prevents unnecessary distractions during other segments while still giving your family a sense of priority.
3. Employ a shared electronic calendar with your family to minimize duplicating appointments and poor communications.

## Barriers to Implementation

**The Mathematicians Fallacy**—“why shouldn’t I just leave 30 minutes early each day and accomplish these items at home?” This is called the mathematicians fallacy because you will not actually leave 30 minutes early to accomplish these tasks, but rather fall into the same patterns as normal when (if!) you go home early

**Hourly Employee**—if you are an hourly employee in a non forward-thinking office, you don’t have ‘professional scheduling’ listed in your job description so it may be considered inappropriate to use worktime for these purposes

## Getting Ahead

I have discovered this segment is only necessary an average of twice per week. If you have a similar experience, do not fret, just move on to segment #11 so you’ll have more time for the best segment of all—#12!

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# Organizing Chaos

## #11: E-wrap

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

Don't own so much clutter that you will be relieved to see your house catch fire.

~Wendell Berry, *Farming: A Handbook*, 1970

### Acceptable Activities

Respond to emails  
Send thoughtful emails  
Sort, delete, filter emails  
Check favored websites

### Time Devoted Daily

30 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

3:30-4:00p

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

Once you have properly trained colleagues you work closely with re: best practices for email use, you will find that checking email only twice per day is plenty. Imagine! In this second email time segment, you'll deal with emails that arrived during the afternoon as well as the less important ones you neglected in the earlier segment. When this segment is done, untether yourself from email until the following morning by turning your email program off.

### Segment Objective

Professionals will thoughtfully respond to emails and send requests of their own. They may also delete, filter, or check key websites as time permits, but not at the expense of thoughtful response. The main difference from the e-triage of segment #4 is that all emails must be dealt with by the conclusion of this segment.

### Activity to Get You Going

In this segment, you will be doing more deleting and sorting than the morning segment. A word here about sorting. Make sure your sub-files are highly detailed and that they mirror the naming patterns of your other work files. To check this, see how long it takes you to find an old email on a topic of your choosing. Did you find it within 30 seconds? If not, you may need a more accurate naming strategy within your sub-file system.



Source: flickr.com

—continued—



*Don't own so much clutter that you will be  
relieved to see your house catch fire.*

~Wendell Berry, *Farming: A Handbook*, 1970

## Time Saving Techniques

1. Write emails of substance so the respondent only needs to respond once. Do not treat email as a chat mechanism—that is laziness.
2. Sub-file every email that is “closed.” Delete every email that is nonsense or advertising.
3. Adopt an email sub-filing system that closely mirrors your other filing systems.
4. Work hard to keep your inbox below 50 items by the end of the day.
5. Use a secondary email address for all non-work related email such as online shopping, social media updates, etc. This will greatly reduce your work related email clutter and you can still check that secondary account once a week to see if anything useful arrived.
6. Do not email about controversial items. Using the phone now may prevent a time-destroying public records request or court case later!
7. Ensure the content of your email is clear. Stay away from colloquial phrases, ALL CAPS, and tones that could be construed as hostile. If you cannot be kind, step away from the computer.

## Barriers to Implementation

**Instant Message Emailers**—some colleagues and clientele treat email like an instant messaging service and hope to engage you in dialogue throughout the day; tip: if it takes a second email just use the phone

**Fear of Missing Something**—the mythical notion that by not checking email at night or first thing in the morning you will miss something important; my experience has been that this only burned me one time is seven years...so lose the fear folks!

## Getting Ahead

This is an excellent time to remind you how NOT to get ahead with email management. Again, unless you are expecting critical news via email, you should not be checking email on special days and certainly not during the special events! When I took a 17-day vacation earlier this year I returned to an email backlog of 480 new emails. It only took two day's worth of email segments to get it all organized. When your inbox is clean for the afternoon, close it down and move onto the best segment yet...

## Citation

Prior to usage in a written work, please send a brief acknowledgment to author Tim Tanner at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu). Here is this lesson's APA citation for your convenience:

Tanner, T. (2015). *Organizing chaos: E-wrap*. [Program of Studies]. Available from the Ohio State University Extension website: <http://go.osu.edu/orgchaos>

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# Organizing Chaos

## #12: Livin' the Dream

Tim Tanner ♦ Extension Educator & County Director

### Sage Saying

Do what you like to do, it will probably turn out to be what you do best.

~Wallace Stegner, *Crossing to Safety*, 1987

### Acceptable Activities

Creative projects  
New, innovative proposals  
Uplifting work from other segments

### Time Devoted Daily

60 minutes

### Suggested Time of Day

4-5p

### Permission

Educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum resource; let the author know how it is working/not working for you at [tanner.128@osu.edu](mailto:tanner.128@osu.edu)

### Introduction

Your reward for another excellent day of work? A chance to dream. Not daydreaming, but envisioning a better county program, better self, better office relationship—whatever chord strikes you at the moment. This segment serves as your incentive for the rest of the day and an uplifting finish to send you home happy.

On days when you are not feeling particularly creative, this time segment serves as a “what is most important to work on right now?” segment. You may have a conference presentation that could use some editing, an upcoming program that needs polish, or an office garden which needs some extra harvesting help. Just make sure you don't always use this segment for these efforts and you'll be fine.

### Segment Objective

Professionals will work on a creative project or something of interest. On less creative days, professionals will work on items from other segments, so long as they are not items associated with drudgery. Finishing off the day in this way will send the professional home satisfied.

### Activity to Get You Going

You probably have a huge backlog of projects which fall into the “if I ever get time, I'd like to...” category. Pick one and get started. It is wonderful how much this improves your job satisfaction!



Source: pixabay.com

—continued—



*Do what you like to do,  
it will probably turn out to be what you do best.*

~Wallace Stegner, *Crossing to Safety*, 1987

## Time Saving Techniques

1. It is perfectly fine in this segment to bounce from creative project to creative project—just not typically in the same day. This is the one segment where the joy of working on the project is as beneficial as the accomplishment of completing it. Innovation takes time and having the right “spark” for a particular subject on a particular day...so work on the one that speaks to you and leave the others on the shelf for another time. The (eventual) end result will be much better if you work with this sense of fluidity.
2. If you are going to have multiple ideas in the hopper, make sure you have a good filing system so you can go back to it when you are ready.

## Barriers to Implementation

**Home is Calling**—the phenomenon whereby you have already put in a good day’s work and would rather just head for the parking lot

**Fear of Excellence**—there are a number of folks (perhaps even the majority) that shy away from becoming excellent for fear of the recognition or additional opportunities it may produce

**Is This Really Work?**—similar to the “Leaders are Readers” segment, some employees wonder if creativity and innovation have a place in Extension work...particularly when the means are emphasized over the ends which is not our norm

## Getting Ahead

There will be days that you do not feel like being excellent. You will be tempted to just close up shop and go home early. This is fine if your family needs to see you or your body needs rest. Yet, most of the time make sure to give this segment your disciplined attention. Soon your mind will clamor to reach this part of the day and you won’t want to miss it. Remember, the work you accomplish during this segment may very well be what defines your trajectory in Extension. What awesome thing will you become known for?

## Citation

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## Introduction

With great relief, our country is finally beginning to understand the value of employee well-being. Rather than a capitulation to the entitlement generations, employee well-being is a critical factor in workplace productivity and innovation. Perhaps the most important factor in one's well-being is good sleep. Each of us has a natural circadian rhythm which dictates our needed sleep pattern. Employees should set their work schedules based on these patterns and not fall victim to the oft repeated myth of "the earlybird gets the worm." For some, working from 6:30a to 2:30p is best while for others 10a to 6p is a better fit. Find out what schedule works best for you and then work with your county director and co-workers to determine office hours/coverage accordingly.

Below is the sample "regular" schedule as shown in the curriculum. Adjust for your own rhythms and patterns. Additionally, a sample schedule for a "special" day is shown to give you a good feel for the scaffolding concept. Again, this will need adaptation to your local context and program area.

### Sample Daily Schedule: "Regular"

9:00a	My County 'Tis of Thee
10:00a	Leaders are Writers
11:00a	Happy Hour
11:30a	E-triage
NOON	Socio-lunchy
1:00p	Administrivia
1:20p	At Your Service
1:50p	Air Break
2:10p	Leaders are Readers
3:00p	Home Away from Home
3:30p	E-wrap
4:00p	Livin' the Dream
5:00p	Go home happy!

### Sample Daily Schedule: "Special"

9:30a	Pick-up event supplies
10:00a	Local event
12:00p	Lunch w/keyleaders of the event
1:30p	Return to the office
1:35p	Prepare for volunteer interviews
2:00p	Volunteer interview I
2:45p	Volunteer interview II
3:30p	Volunteer interview III
4:15p	Home for supper break
6:30p	Evening meeting I
8:00p	Evening meeting II
10:00p	Home

*I took the other road, all right, but only because it was the easy road for me, the way I wanted to go. If I've encountered some unnecessary resistance that's because most of the traffic is going the other way.*

—Edward Abbey, *Postcards from Ed*, 2006





## Introduction

My recommendation is that you use the Administrivia segment each Friday afternoon to organize your next week's work. This will help you to focus early next week and reduce the effects of the Monday morning blahs. It serves as your guide and checklist, but know that other things will come up and need to be penciled in.

Below is a recent schedule of mine. It is provided to help bring clarity to your understanding of the segments.

Time	Segment	Project A	Project B	Project C	Keep these in mind
9:09a	<b>My County 'Tis of Thee</b>	2016 4-H packet prep work	meet w/Bob about HarrPromise	speech for Vol Banquet	spring 2016 fundraiser dates
10:10a	<b>Leaders are Writers</b>	OC curriculum by Dec 1	draft questions for Teen Index		Re-write for OE journal
11:11a	<b>Happy Hour</b>	Set up office's new Box acct.	Begin flash drive file back-up	Desk is out of control!	
11:40a	<b>E-triage</b>				
12:12p	<b>Socio-lunchy</b>				
1:11p	<b>Administrivia</b>	Peer review requests from staff	Impact statements due after receiving edits back	Thank yous for Vol Banquet--princess & caterers	set holiday staff lunch for mid-Dec
1:33p	<b>Air Break</b>				
1:55p	<b>At Your Service</b>	Camp board meeting agenda packet by Nov 18	Wrap ODNR grant financial statement	Upload design team edits to Box	
2:22p	<b>Leaders are Readers</b>	Look in files for OC curriculum quotes	Fowler's survey book		
3:33p	<b>Home Away from Home</b>	Find out when Christmas tree place is open & \$\$	Re-schedule vision appt.	Register for spring classes by Nov 24	
4:04p	<b>E-wrap</b>	Quarterly deletion of the deleted & sent items folders	Register & reservations for AC		
4:33p	<b>Livin' the Dream</b>	OC curriculum by Dec 1	AC Poster by Dec 1	TI proposal by Dec 10	Brainstorm topic for NAAEE 2016

*Most people feel best about their work the week before their vacation, but it's not because of the vacation itself. What do you do the last week before you leave on a big trip? You clean up, close up, clarify, and renegotiate all your agreements with yourself and others. I just suggest you do this weekly instead of yearly.*

—David Allen, *Getting Things Done*, 2001



## **Educators Balancing Work and Family Life**

Kendra & Tim Tanner ♦ Spouse & Extension Educator

Ohio State University Extension

April 2014

*...I believe in my own **work** and in the opportunity I have to make **my life** useful to humanity...* ~ESP ♦ Extension Professional's Creed

### **BALANCING WORK**

**The 35\* hour office schedule** (\*number varies slightly by program area and season)

Do you overschedule your office/program hours and forget about all of the a la carte events/meetings? Are your regular committees meeting at the most efficient times? Do you know when you can say yes to additional roles and responsibilities? Do the public/your Office Associate know what your professional schedule is?

**The crucible of modern technology**

Who can have your cell phone number? What expectations do you set for work-related callers/texters? When do you quit emailing each night? When you go home on Friday evening, is your email inbox manageable?

**Take the long view**

Are you taking time out of the office for journal/grant writing, service to profession, building teams, etc.? Do you make the most of every "required" event? How often do you eat lunch with your office mates or beloved colleagues? Is it appropriate to form friendships/Facebook-ships with co-workers and volunteers?

### **BALANCING FAMILY**

**Nights and weekends**

Are you working more than two nights (or one night + one weekend day) per week? Are you communicating about required "throwaway" weeks and finding inventive ways to get family face time anyway? What is your personal family investment level on nights and weekends (leaving "work at work" is only the first step!)?

**Communications and calendaring**

How often do you schedule last minute items for nights or weekends? Do you have a shared e-calendar with those that matter most?



### **Overnights**

Do you always check before you add new work overnights (conferences, trainings, camps, etc.) to your work schedule? Are there creative and inexpensive times you can invite the family along?

### **YOU are the Employee**

Are you fair to your spouse/kids re: functions that they would traditionally be encouraged to attend as tag-alongs or show-offs? Should your children join 4-H in another county or not at all?

## **FINDING BALANCE**

### **Personal wellness**

Are you feeding the machine? Other than throwaway weeks, is your sleep regular? How many cups of coffee do you need to “get started” each day?

### **Creativity and flow**

How often do you try new and difficult things (by choice) at work or home? Do you cordon off time to creatively engage your work specialization areas?

### **Vacation and interests**

Are you taking at least one real (chosen) full-length (1+ week) vacation (completely unconnected) each year? Have you found time to engage in at least one active and one passive personal interest area outside of work/family?

## **OTHER TIDBITS**

- ◆ Professional scheduling can cause you more harm than good. Most of the time, routine is essential to your professional success. (How your Office Associate feels about you goes a long way toward your long-term reputation.)
- ◆ Allegory: Do you trust a nurse when you see them take a smoke break?
- ◆ Anything you bring from home to your work life may be used for/against you.

*In Closing: A wise man once said, “You cannot serve two masters...you will love the one and hate the other.” When you experience stress in your home life, ask yourself, “Am I currently serving my family needs first?” Then, make the changes necessary to regain the needed balance!*



## Introduction

The following two pages offer time management solutions specifically geared toward support staff. Though many of the principles are the same, the unique nuances of the job required a mildly different approach.

Before we get to those, I wanted to share some of the authors who inspired this curriculum. As I indicated in the *Leaders are Readers* segment, the more you read the more your horizons will broaden. If you are looking for some good reading, check out the ones that sound the most interesting to you. (All biographical sketches are provided to assist the reader and are by no means exhaustive.)

## Authors (alphabetical by last name)

- Edward Abbey:** rugged individualist and contrarian who was highly educated but lived simply in the American West; I recommend you read *Desert Solitaire* in the spring
- Wendell Berry:** poet, novelist, and essayist from Kentucky who writes thought-provoking works on modern American challenges; I recommend *Hannah Coulter* (fiction), *The Ways of Ignorance*, and *The Unsettling of America*
- Nikki Giovanni:** probably the premier poet representing black life in America she was the poet-of-honor for President Obama's inauguration ceremony; I recommend *The Collected Poetry* as your first stop
- Wes Jackson:** a geneticist from Kansas, Mr. Jackson works hard to restore broken soil and communities through his work with The Land Institute; try *Becoming Native to This Place* or *Nature as Measure* when you are ready for some deep reading
- David Kline:** an Amish novelist from Ohio whose simple prose shares the beauty of living within the rhythms of each season in *Great Possessions* and its sequel *Scratching the Woodchuck*; I recommend reading both of these treasured works in late winter
- Anne Lamott:** a humorous yet depth-filled author from California whose writing really packs a punch; I recommend *Bird by Bird* for the struggling writer and *Traveling Mercies* for the struggling human
- Wallace Stegner:** though an avid historian and essayist, he is probably best known as the "Dean of Western Writers;" of special note, he also served as the writing professor for Edward Abbey and Wendell Berry; I recommend *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs*

Who inspires you...



# Time Management for Support Staff

**Michelle Moon**, Office Associate, Carroll County, OSU Extension, The Ohio State University.

**Tim Tanner**, 4-H Youth Development Educator, Harrison County, OSU Extension, The Ohio State University.

## Introduction

For those of you who have read the OSU Extension Educators' resource on time management entitled *Organizing Chaos*, you know that I believe support staff play the most important role in our organization. You are the professional "front door" to Extension for most of our clientele, and your expertise is often unmatched by similar professionals in neighboring agencies. Due to this high level of skill a vast and ambitious workload regularly falls upon your shoulders. Finding time to complete all duties with diligence and creativity is difficult. This fact sheet provides research and experience-based time management solutions for support staff. What will you do to improve your job satisfaction this year?



Source: quotesgram.com

*Don't mistake movement for achievement. It's easy to get faked out by being busy. The question is: "Busy doing what?" ~J. Rohn*



Source: pinterest.com

## Obstacles to Time Management

Many time management challenges you face relate to your interactions with co-workers. Here are three common traps which hinder your effective operations:

1. **Doormat Syndrome:** Feeling like the low person on the totem pole. Stuck with the projects others don't want. Feeling like your work/efforts are less valued.
2. **Happy Helper Syndrome:** Trying to be a team player by covering for the deficiencies of a co-worker rather than ensuring they "learn to fish" on their own.
3. **Just This Once Syndrome:** Late on Friday, you find yourself bailing out the co-worker who failed to manage his/her time effectively. Rinse. Repeat. Pattern formed.

The solution to each of these is a direct yet kind conversation with the office offender.

## Structural Hurdles

If not a co-worker challenge, you may find yourself facing one of these...

- Recent downsizing but similar workload expectations
- Additional program staff have been added to the office without additional support staff positions

If you are facing one of these structural hurdles, communicate your concern with your supervisor and ensure remedial action.



## Network for Efficiency

As you meet other colleagues at TERSSA gatherings or similar professional development opportunities, be sure to network during the social hours. You will discover colleagues talented in duties you struggle with and they will find out your strengths. As your office faces new challenges or tasks, networks provide a wealth of support to draw upon. This strengths-based approach saves everyone time and puts a better product in front of our clientele.



## Principles of Segmentation

In *Flourish*, leading social psychologist Martin Seligman discusses human satisfaction in the workplace. Perhaps his key finding for our purposes relates to the principle of segmentation. His research demonstrates that we experience great satisfaction from accomplishing huge projects or numerous tiny tasks. Unfortunately, much of the work of Extension falls somewhere in the messier middle. Too much time residing in this middle ground leads to worker dissatisfaction and burnout.

Because mega projects are rare for support staff, it is psychologically important for them to adopt a segmented daily work schedule. This ensures that each day possess a thematic, guiding flow of accomplishing small tasks. Though walk-in clientele and phone calls ensure that no two days are exactly alike, living within this overarching schedule provides comfort and satisfaction to many workers. Based on the typical job duty elements of Extension support staff, a sample schedule is provided below for your consideration. It should be adjusted to fit your personal and office norms.

## Sample Daily Schedule: Full-time Office Associate

8:00a	Technical_Creative : program flyers; website design; newsletter photos
8:40a	Technical_Fiscal : reconciliations; banking; travel
9:20a	Clerical_Mailings : send/receive/forward/recycle
10:00a	Break : morning walk; substantive snack
10:20a	Communications Triage : email responses; phone calls; voice mail : ensure your co-workers know that email is not an emergency mode
10:40a	Information Management_Correspondence: tasks to/from co-workers
11:20a	Clerical_Data Processing : copying; data entry; transcribing
12:00p	Social Lunch : encourage colleagues to eat together when possible
1:00p	Information Management_Record Keeping : data entry; evaluations
1:40p	Program Triage : final time to help program staff each day; catch-up
3:00p	Break : afternoon walk; light snack
3:20p	Communications Triage : email responses; outgoing phone calls
3:40p	Information Management_Continuing Education: modules; networking
4:20p	Technical_Web/media : press releases; website updates; social media



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## Support Staff Pledge

*Want to experience more satisfaction at work this year? Take the time management pledge today!*

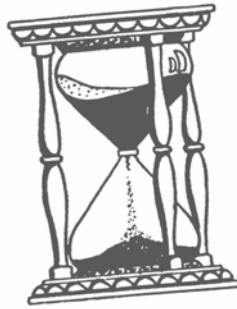
I \_\_\_\_\_ pledge to be an excellent support staff member by taking care of myself in the following ways and means this year:

- ❖ I will use at least 75% of my annual vacation time.
- ❖ I will go to the doctor, dentist, etc. every time I should.
- ❖ I will participate in and attend professional development opportunities for my position.
- ❖ I will ensure my intra-office colleagues communicate with me fairly and professionally.
- ❖ I will ensure my workload is reasonable and diverse. If it is not I will work with my supervisor to improve the workload.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

*It is the beginning of wisdom when you recognize that the best you can do is choose which rules you want to live by, and it's persistent and aggravated imbecility to pretend you can live without any.*

—Wallace Stegner, *All the Little Live Things*, 1967



*So, friends, every day do something that won't compute... Give your approval to all you cannot understand... Ask the questions that have no answers. Put your faith in two inches of humus that will build under the trees every thousand years... Laugh. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts... Practice resurrection.*

—Wendell Berry, *The Country of Marriage*, 1973