



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set I Number 19

February 2000

Set I Strategies for Societies

Time Management

by Dawne Slater-Putt, CG

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

The Time Management paper offers tips on how to balance the enthusiastic response of accepting new project work on behalf of the society and then finding the time to get the work done. Find extra minutes in your day after reading this paper to get things done.

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Set I Strategies for Societies Time Management

by Dawne Slater-Putt, CG

It happens to most of us – we get caught up in the enthusiasm at a genealogical society meeting and before we know it, we have volunteered to fill an office or chair a committee. This is a good thing, for without volunteers our genealogical societies would languish. However, the stress we feel when we discover we may have agreed to do more than our schedules allow is NOT a good thing.

Fortunately, time management tips can allow volunteers to find those extra minutes that may make a difference in balancing their society workload with other responsibilities.

AVOID WASTED TIME

One way to find extra minutes in a day is to be aware of “wasted” time. This does not mean that watching a ball game on television or leisurely reading the Sunday newspaper are taboo; relaxation and participating in enjoyable activities are not wasting time! “Wasted” time usually is time spent waiting for something to

happen – waiting for a train to pass, an appointment to begin, dinner to cook, or a hold message to end on the telephone. Many small or clerical tasks can be accomplished during these times if the volunteer is prepared for them.

Keep a notebook and pens in your vehicle. When you are caught in traffic, waiting for a train, or between appointments, brainstorm about your society responsibilities.

- Presidents can outline agendas and columns for the newsletter.
- Newsletter and quarterly editors might jot down story ideas and names of potential authors to contact.
- Program chairs can plan a year’s worth of programs.
- Committee chairs may chart a list of goals, make a “to do” list, or plan telephone calls and letters.

A cellular telephone lets you take this a step further and get started on your list. (Of course, none of the above suggestions should be attempted while driving.)

Having office supplies and committee files in the kitchen or family room – wherever you “live” the most – allows you to take advantage of odd moments of time at home. Many society jobs include data entry, envelope stuffing, addressing or label-sticking and other work that, while important, requires only minimal concentration. These are perfect tasks to work on while cooking dinner, watching television, or waiting on the telephone.

In fact, tasks like folding correspondence, stuffing envelopes and attaching labels need so little concentration that they can be done while talking on the telephone. The key is always to have something to do near the telephone, or invest in a cordless phone.

Take advantage of modern technology and use voice mail, answering machines, e-mail and fax whenever possible. These conveniences allow you to send messages when it most suits you, and for the person on the receiving end to answer according to his or her schedule.

REDUCE

Another time management tip that dovetails with the above is to break large tasks into small pieces. For example:

Compose a letter or flyer longhand while waiting to be called into the doctor’s office.

Type it into the computer and print it while the family is watching television that evening.

Copy it at a print center the next time you are out.

That evening, fold the letter at the kitchen counter while dinner is cooking.

Stuff the envelopes at a television tray while having family time.

Address labels can be attached during phone conversations, dinner preparation or television time another evening.

Breaking a task down into those “wasted” time spaces during three or four days can save you several hours of prime time otherwise needed to accomplish a project.

Nowhere is it written that a project must be finished in one sitting. Trying to do so when you already have a busy schedule can be daunting. Instead, slow but steady progress toward the end goal can energize and motivate you.

ORGANIZE

Create files for your society responsibilities. When you have reduced tasks to smaller pieces, keep partially finished work or brainstorming idea sheets in the appropriate files. Make lists and keep notes related to your projects. These might include:

- To-do lists for your job or project.
- Lists of things that you promise to do during the course of a society meeting.
- Notes about what was discussed regarding your job or project during the society meeting (for example, what others promised to do so that you can follow up with them).
- Notes about tasks that you have delegated to others, again so that you can follow up on those assignments.

Each list and note goes in your project file, along with other information you need to perform your responsibility. This might include

telephone numbers and addresses of pertinent people, copies of the society's standing rules and bylaws, minutes of previous society meetings, and notes from the former committee chair or office holder.

Keep a planner or calendar and remember to look at it! Write down not only the deadlines relating to your project, but also plan time to work actively on the project a few days, weeks, or months ahead of the deadline, as is appropriate for your specific project. This will keep the deadline from sneaking up on you.

Use one calendar or planner for society, family and work responsibilities so that you do not double-schedule yourself. Train yourself to look at the big picture, which means to project ahead when considering your calendar.

PRIORITIZE

Are there breaks in your schedule that you can use to work ahead on your society project? When prioritizing the tasks relating to your office, project or committee, consider three factors: deadline, importance and time commitment. In some cases, your schedule may be so busy that you will be able to work only on the task with the next impending deadline. During those times, don't worry about other tasks; concentrate on the one at hand. When your schedule is freer, work ahead on small tasks toward a large job that is due later.

When prioritizing according to importance, consider whether the task must be done, should be done, or would be nice to do if time permitted. Sometimes we mentally move "nice to do" tasks to our "must do" list without realizing it, causing more stress than is necessary. A society meeting without a holiday theme tablecloth and homemade cookies is one thing; a meeting without a program is quite another.

Get out of the habit of having to be "in the mood" to complete a particular task. If your schedule is free enough to allow you to work on your project when the mood strikes, great! But if you find a deadline approaching when you are not in the mood for project work, do it anyway. You may well find that once you start, the mood follows. If not, then it may not be your very best work. That idea may not please the perfectionists among us. But in most cases a project that is not perfect is better than a project that is not done at all.

BALANCE

The old saying, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" applies to time management. Balance business with pleasure. If you are responsible for an office in the society or a long-term project, commit to work on that job for a certain amount of time per day or week. Once you have honored that commitment, give yourself permission to put the society work aside and do other things.

For example, you might plan to spend twenty minutes each evening on data entry of addresses for an upcoming mailing. At the end of your twenty minutes, stop and consider; Do you feel like doing some additional data entry, or would you rather watch a television program or work on your own genealogical research?

SHARE AND DELEGATE

Consider sharing your society responsibilities with a friend. This is another way to break tasks down into smaller pieces. If your society is having trouble finding someone to manage a large committee, and you are reluctant to volunteer because of the time commitment involved; perhaps you can find a friend to co-chair the committee with you.

Delegating part of your responsibilities can ease

your workload. Clerical tasks can be assigned to other volunteers, friends, or family. Teen-age children or grandchildren may be willing to fold mailings or stuff envelopes for a nominal reward, such as pizza and soda.

Enlist the aid of professionals from time to time. It may be worth paying out of your own pocket for typesetting, folding, collating, or other services in order to save the time of doing these tasks yourself.

SUMMARY

Take advantage of odd moments of time to work toward your goals, break large tasks into smaller units, organize and prioritize your work, share and delegate, and balance business with pleasure. You will be surprised at how these steps can help you become more efficient at managing your society volunteer time.

REFERENCES

Three books that were not written specifically for genealogists, but that can be extremely helpful in the area of organization and time management are:

Hemphill, Barbara, *Taming the Paper Tiger at Home*. Washington D.C.: Kiplinger Books, 1998.

_____. *Taming the Paper Tiger at Work*. Washington, D.C.: Kiplinger Books, 1998.

Sapadin, Linda and Jack Maguire. *It's About Time! The Six Styles of Procrastination and How to Overcome Them*. New York: Penguin, 1997.

Biography

Dawne Slater-Putt, CG, is president and co-owner of Heritage Pathways, Inc.; a professional research, author; teacher; and lecturer. She is the president of the Indiana Genealogical Society; FGS director; book review editor for the Association of Professional Genealogists Quarterly; and a columnist for the FGS FORUM.

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