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Time Management

This chapter will enable you to:

- ▶ Record and evaluate how you spend your time.
- ▶ Be aware of time management strategies.
- ▶ Reorganize some of your activities to consistently accomplish the highest-priority tasks.
- ▶ Begin to consider tasks to delegate to others.

Even the most organized managers can find themselves spending most of their time scrambling from task to task, putting out fires, always feeling they are falling behind. Feeling that way on a regular basis over a long period of time can lead to burnout as well as being made a manager less than effective. Most managers can benefit from examining how they spend their time and reorganizing some of their time according to their priorities for the market.

Time Analysis

Suppose you were asked how you spend your work time each day. Could you provide an answer without having to think about it? Could you realistically estimate how much time you spend in meetings or making phone calls? What about on event promotion and advertising? How much time is committed to paperwork?

One management motto worth considering is “Plan your work and work your plan.” Most managers do some of this intuitively, but many also find themselves wondering why they never get around to certain tasks. Do you have goals for the market? Have you listed all your responsibilities? Do you know which ones are the highest priority and what will happen if those items are not accomplished? Do you have a strategy for accomplishing the most important tasks? And if so, do you actually practice it? A work plan can be a valuable aid in managing your time.

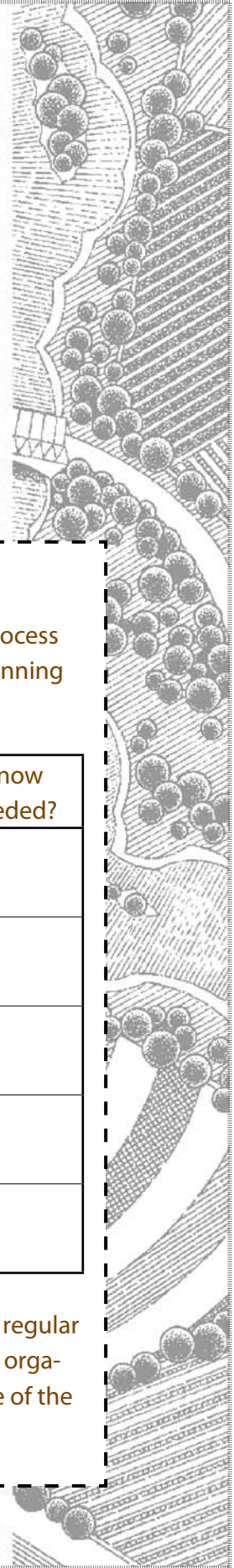
Consider analyzing how you spend your time at work. It may take a while, but the end result can be a considerable reduction in the time spent on minutiae and more time available for work that will produce the biggest results for your market.

Step One: List all of the routine activities you perform. A few typical categories are paperwork, planning, telephone calls, and meetings. List your responsibilities in order of importance and highlight those that need a great deal of time. For example, some extremely important activities, such as keeping in



touch with your board of directors, may take a small amount of the overall time you spend at work. Leave a space next to each activity so you can record the time you spend on each one daily. Do this for several weeks.

Step Two: After two or three weeks or two or three markets (whichever is longer), total the time figures and generate some percentages based on the average time you spent on each aspect of market management work every day. You may be surprised at the results. Were the most important jobs given the time they require? Were there any particular chores that consistently required a large portion of your day? Were small tasks really as fast and efficient as you thought they were?



An Organizational Plan – Review Your Organizational Goals

Volume Three of this series, *Growing Your Farmers Market*, takes you through the process of creating a strategic marketing plan for your market. Here, we show the basic planning document you can use to manage your time.

Goal/Activities	Person/People Responsible	Timeline/Milestones	How Will You Know You Have Succeeded?

Refer to this organizational plan to help you prioritize your time. Which tasks need regular attention? How much time do they require? Compare your time analysis with your organizational goals and use any discrepancies to reorganize your work time. Use some of the time management strategies that follow to help you stay on track.

Time Management Strategies

One way to make sure that you really are moving forward with the larger goals you have set for yourself is to break them into specific tasks using the organizational plan shown here. If you have a big goal, break it into several smaller tasks until it seems manageable. Allocate time for you to accomplish those tasks within your daily routine. Analyzing your time in this way will ensure not only that you are working more productively and efficiently but that you also are continually working toward the overall goals and objectives that have been identified in the planning process.

Planning a Time Budget

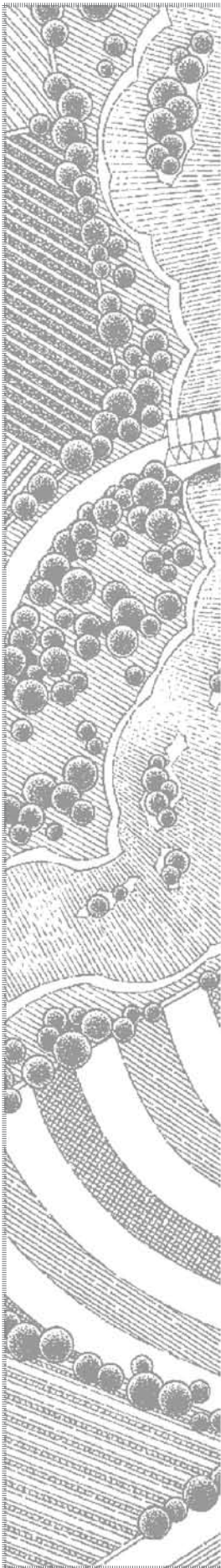
After evaluating how you spend your time on the job, the next step is preparing a time budget. However, whether your week is ten, twenty or forty hours long, do not feel that you have to budget every single minute. Attempting at that could be more dangerous than what you are presently doing—you could become compulsive and lose the spontaneity and flexibility that is needed to run a farmers market.

Most time management consultants agree that you should try to budget about 90 percent of your time. If you can plan ahead for eighteen hours of a twenty-hour week, for instance, then you are doing great. You will need the remaining hours to take care of unexpected calls and last minute situations as they arise.

Once you have planned your week, you will have a better idea regarding what you have to do each day and how you will accomplish it. During the week, take ten or fifteen minutes at the end of the day to go over your plan for the next day and make sure that you have not forgotten anything and that what you have scheduled is reasonable. Those few minutes of planning can save you hours in wasted time the next day and throughout the week. Once you get in the habit of planning your time this way, you should find that you become more efficient and productive.

Organizing Tasks

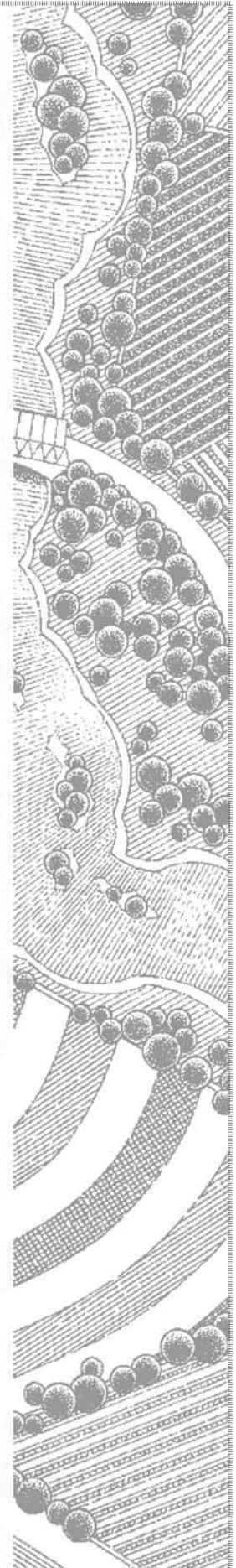
One source on time management advises managers that it is best to gather up similar jobs and take care of them together. The time it takes to switch gears from one task to another adds up when it is done multiple times a day. A manager of a large, urban farmers market says that every morning he figures out who he needs to call and then tries to reach as many people in one sitting as possible. He finds that this makes his office hours feel more focused and relaxed since it reduces interruptions from answering and making phone calls in the middle of other chores. Allocate time for sending and responding to emails in a similar manner.



Prioritizing Activities

While you may have some understanding of the relative importance of various tasks, it can help to take the time to formally prioritize them. Some tasks may be very important to the long-range vision of the organization but are not the most urgent. Other tasks may feel urgent but are really not that important to the big picture. Steven Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, draws a distinction between urgent and important activities and how people can learn to prioritize their work lives to make the best use of their time. The Time Management Matrix shown here divides daily activities into four quadrants that are ranked as being some combination of Important, Not Important, Urgent, and Not Urgent. Covey argues that many people spend 90 percent of their time in the first quadrant doing things that seem urgent but actually are not very important to the long-range goals of the organization. To be an effective manager and effectively take control of how you manage your time, you should spend more time on activities in the second quadrant. Instead of reacting to crises and problems all the time, quadrant-II people think proactively and preventively. "They feed opportunities and starve problems." Quadrant-II activities also are ones that require the most brain power, and, since they are not the most pressing, are ones that are most often set aside.

The Time Management Matrix		
	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p>I ACTIVITIES Crises, pressing problems, deadline-driven projects.</p>	<p>II ACTIVITIES Prevention, relationship-building, planning.</p>
Not Important	<p>III ACTIVITIES Interruptions, some phone calls and mail, some reports and meetings, proximate pressing matters, popular activities.</p>	<p>IV ACTIVITIES Trivia, busy work, some mail and phone calls, time wasters, pleasant activities.</p>



Keep Interruptions to a Minimum

It has been estimated that managers are interrupted an average of six times per hour. Each time you are interrupted, you lose focus and it takes time to regain that focus when you go back to your task.

One way to avoid unnecessary interruptions is to take the time in the beginning of a project to plan and delegate tasks so that everyone involved understands their roles and responsibilities. This will save you from “putting out fires” in the long run. If you have a group project, bring together all those involved to plan a course of action so you do not have to answer everyone’s individual questions later. Periodic meetings with your vendors is another way to address many people’s questions at once.

Communicating clearly with people is another way to avoid unnecessary and time-consuming questions. Post a bulletin board at the market and get vendors in the habit of checking it for weekly updates. Some markets use newsletters or memos to inform vendors and customers about what is happening at the market.



Make Appointments with Yourself

Finally, when you have a big project that needs your undivided attention, set an appointment with yourself to work on it and treat that appointment as seriously as one you would make with a colleague. Close your office door or go to a quiet place—whatever it takes to get the time alone that you need to accomplish the task. You will be much more productive if you can work for a period of time without interruption.

Delegate

According to time management consultants, people underestimate the time they spend on tasks that others could easily do or are already doing. For example, are you tallying up numbers that your vendors are also figuring out for their own records? Scheduling a time for communication would be more efficient than both of you doing the same job—maybe you can rotate the chore instead. Or, in other instances, a job may be more effectively handled by somebody else. The next chapter discusses the process of delegation.

Conclusion

While prioritizing and using time management strategies can help you to use the time you have to greatest effect, you may simply be trying to do more than you have time for. If that is the case, delegating some of your work can help, as can better communication and involvement on the part of your board of directors and vendors and community support. All the management strategies in this volume work together to make your time more manageable and your efforts more successful.

