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This manual is useful for those in active ministry, those preparing for ministry, and for those who are preparing others for ministry. The material, added to your own, may form the basis for workshops or discussion groups.



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INTRODUCTION

This monograph is about preventing job burnout in ministry through [effective time management](#).

Poor time management is a major cause of burnout (a mild form of depression) and demoralization (lack of enthusiasm) in ministry. A sense of being overburdened starts to seep into awareness. Lack of enthusiasm for the day's schedule becomes apparent. A desire to avoid people and tasks may grow. That's burnout. So to prevent burnout by using effective time management...

- We'll talk about the scriptural mandate for effective time management in ministry. Even God warns us about the ill-effects of poor time management.
- We'll talk about how effective time management can create enthusiasm and a sense of well-being, a sense of competency and a sense of enthusiasm for carrying out and developing one's ministry.
- We'll define effective time management and how poor time management creates stress that leads to burnout in ministry.
- We'll talk about the positive role of procrastination in effective time management.
- We'll talk about the essential role that goals play in effective time management and how time is wasted without them.
- We'll talk about the necessary language for goal-setting.

- We'll talk about how to create a goal so that it's different from a mere wish.
- We'll talk about administrative time-wasters such as meetings where all the wrong people are brought together.
- We'll talk about personality time-wasters such as the need to be perceived as loving and caring and how people can use that to defeat your need to stay focused and on time.
- And we'll talk about how to correct these enemies of efficient time management. How to create more than 24 hours in your day (by saving your own time and using other people's time in delegating tasks and problem-solving.)

So Let's get started...

Section I

Scriptural Mandate for Efficient Time Management.

In the parable of the ten virgins...Mt 25:1ff...there are five foolish virgins who procrastinate and do not take the time to get oil for their lamps in preparation for the Lord's wedding feast. The other five were prepared. The goal was to be ready for the Lord when he arrived to take them to the wedding feast. Well, the ones who didn't go shopping for oil for their lamps were taken by surprise when the Lord showed up unexpectedly. They asked the prepared virgins to share their oil...and were refused. They had no time to go shopping in the market place...but they went anyway thinking all would be well. But, they were wrong and they missed the wedding feast.

If the goal of ministry is to bring yourself and the people closer to God...and it is...then you have to do all of the things necessary to achieve that goal...in a timely manner.

So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you

do not expect, the Son of Man will come (Mt 24:44).

So, the scriptures warn that all must be in readiness when the Lord comes. That means ministry goals must be done timely. When they are not, you waste time, the ministry is not on schedule, and conditions such as burnout use up even more time.

Section II

Effective Time Management and Enthusiasm

Anyone who has ever experienced the emptiness of burnout can tell you how long it takes to recover. **Setting ministry goals and using time efficiently to achieve them prevents burnout by fostering a sense of competency and accomplishment.**

While most ministers set 'large' goals, such as fundraising for a new church, they often forget that small inefficiencies accumulate into large ones and interfere with the timeliness of the ministry.

When time is used efficiently all day, every day, you will be surprised how much time you have left over to 'squander' on fun, on reading news, on emailing, on pursuing hobbies and days off.

And make no mistake about it...fun time, down time, free time, whatever you want to call it, must be factored into the minister's daily schedule.

There was a young priest who said with pride during a workshop that he had not had a vacation in the seven years he was ordained. He was committed, he said, to being available to serve the people 24/7.

Ministry, defined on our [Homepage](#) as

**Religious activity...that brings both minister
and the people closer to God...**

indicates that ministry is not a 24 hour a day activity. In fact, for much of the week the minister doesn't do ministry...religious

activity...but spends most of the week doing support activities for ministry (e.g. coaching the parish youth basketball team).

Neglecting to factor free time into time management is the highway to burnout...a precursor to depression.

Section III

Effective Time Management Defined

Effective time management is...

**allocation of sufficient time and sufficient resources
to accomplish a predetermined outcome or goal.**

We all manage time one way or another; some muddle through the day and wonder how they did it. Others zip through the day with purpose and confidence and know exactly how they did it.

Effective time management puts the emphasis on 'effective'...which means to bring something about...to create something from one's efforts. So...

To be effective means to use just the right amount of time to accomplish something.

Too little time...and you'll have to do it over.

Too much time...and you'll whittle away the time you have for other tasks...which leads to stress...which leads to [job burnout](#).

So you have to decide how much time you can stay on the phone with a non-stop talker.

How much time can you devote to unexpected problems? Under some circumstances is procrastination in order (see below)?

If you are a micromanager who needs to have your finger in every pie and on everyone's pulse, you will be under pressure because you must be the solution to all problems. If you are a micromanager, the people who work with and for you will drag

their feet in doing their assigned duties until they have your approval. And you'll be so busy micromanaging, that it may be some time before you can give someone the go ahead.

Micromanaging uses up everyone's time.

So if you are a micromanager, learn how to manage without the micro.

Using the body as an example...the heart is central to life.

But it does not oversee the lungs or the digestive system.

Those proceed according to delegated procedures for the needs of that part of the system.

They don't wait for the heart to make a decision before they perform...even though without the heart nothing functions.

Surround yourself with competent people...give them the authority to do their job...**and the boundaries of their authority**...and then have them report to you periodically on how it's going.

Keep in mind when delegating that people who love to be helpful often overstep their bounds...sometimes seriously. They do things for others unnecessarily. They love to be needed...even when they're not needed.

For example, a pastor took over a parish where the secretary had done everything for the former pastor.

This included counseling troubled parishioners on spiritual and temporal matters. She could not, she said, discuss these matters

with the new pastor as they were confidential because they included matters of conscience.

In effect, she had become the pastor.

In another example, the treasurer of a women's religious community had become everyone's problem-solver.

She controlled the flow of information about all aspects of the community.

She held her job for so long because in effect she was the only person who knew all the details of the community's functioning. So, incoming administrations just reappointed her.

A new administration decided the 'traditional' treasurer had served long enough. But she had so many supporters in the community that ousting her would create a major upheaval in morale.

They had to solve the problem by creating a new organization chart for the community administration and amending their bylaws to make sure that tenure in any office ended when the current administration ended.

They solved the treasurer problem, but much time was spent in dealing with the negative reaction of the treasurer's supporters.

Overly 'helpful' people use up valuable time by crossing boundaries inappropriately.

When delegating authority to manage time efficiently, make sure you describe exactly the extent of the authority you delegate. Otherwise you will use up significant amounts of time correcting serious boundary problems.

Section IV

Effective Time Management Using Procrastination

Many people think that procrastination is a negative thing.

But, think about that for a moment.

If you were in a rage at someone and felt like socking them in the jaw, wouldn't it be good to procrastinate and put that off? If you felt like telling off a colleague, wouldn't it be good to put that off until you thought about the consequences? If you were annoyed at your boss and felt like telling her off, wouldn't it be a good idea to delay doing it.

Here's an example where procrastination would be appropriate.

There was a seminarian working in a parish who was being given feedback on his performance by the pastor. The seminarian liked the positive statements the pastor made about him, but became annoyed with those things that he was told needed improvement. First, he argued with the pastor about the pastor's "erroneous perceptions" of him. Second, when the pastor reaffirmed his impressions of the seminarian, the seminarian said "Oh, shut up Father." And stormed out of the interview in a high snit.

Not cool to disrespect legitimate authority for someone who is going to take a solemn oath of obedience on ordination day. If he had done that with his boss as a layman, he would have been fired on the spot.

Procrastination is a most useful skill. Problem is most people procrastinate about the wrong things. In its negative sense,

people put off doing what they need to do...and don't do what they do need to do.

Effective procrastination puts off what is less important in favor of what is more important.

Established daily routines may be ways of procrastinating.

Let's say, for example that you are not ready to deal with parish administrative matters until you've had your coffee, breakfast, read the paper, gone online to check email, visited several favorite news sites, read and posted in a favorite blog, and, lo and behold, it's 10:30 and you haven't prepared for your 11 o'clock meeting with the finance committee. You're ten minutes late for the meeting, flustered, not mentally prepared, and therefore not fully attentive. The meeting runs overtime because you were late. You wolf down a fast food lunch to be on time for your next appointment. Stress is already consuming a part of your energy.

When daily routines cause procrastination...just move those routines to the end of the day...as a reward for having had a good day. How do you do that? Easy.

Make a handwritten list of you day's activities and hang it on the hanger with your shirt or dress, or paste it on the mirror so you can read it while you're shaving (men) or making up (ladies). Put it somewhere so it will greet you first thing.

And if you do that, after about three days you will get a real surprise.

As you read your list, you will find yourself thinking about getting at it right away. Your usual procrastinator's routine is broken.

Lists are made for one purpose only – to cross off items as they are completed.

You may think of other ways to interfere in a daily routine that causes you to procrastinate in the negative sense. When you put off those time-consuming procrastinations you are then procrastinating in a positive and effective way.

So learn how...and when...to procrastinate.

Section V

Goals Are the Ends that Dictate the Means

There is no such thing as effective time management without goals. Consciously setting goals for one's life may seem like a daunting task to many people. But the fact is, it's easy to do. Because...

Almost everyone sets goals. Kids set goals, adults set goals, even pets set goals.

In fact, the daily life of most normally active people is to reach the goals of the day.

- Catch the school bus on time...
- Get to class on time...
- Get that term paper in on time...
- Be home on time...

are just a few of the goals kids have to achieve every day.

- When a pet dog with a wagging tail brings you a frisbee, his goal is to have a good romp with you.
- When a crawling baby grabs the edge of a coffee table, her goal is to stand up.

- When an adult drives to the supermarket, the goal is to get something for dinner.

And so on, all day long.

Goals determine our behavior and make our actions relevant and efficient.

If the grocery store is five blocks away, you don't drive a roundabout twenty-block route to get there. That's not relevant behavior and it certainly isn't an efficient use of time.

So, one of the important reasons to set goals is to use time efficiently by making sure our actions are relevant to the goal.

When people complain that they do not have enough time to accomplish what they need or want to do, that is a sure sign they are not using time efficiently in their daily activities.

Using time efficiently means taking just enough time to complete a particular goal. If you take too much time, you crowd the rest of your daily goals and put yourself under unneeded pressure...which is the first step on the road to job burnout.

If you take too little time for a goal, you may not achieve it and have to do something over again. Doing something twice is the same as taking too long with a task and leads to the same results...stress...burnout.

Section VI

The language of goal-setting

When you've set a well-stated goal you can tell immediately whether what you are doing is relevant to achieving the goal. If it isn't, it's wasting time and procrastinating in the negative sense...leading to potential stress during the rest of the day.

So what is a well stated goal. "I want to get the car washed today" is a poorly stated goal because **the goal in that sentence is "want"**...an internal state. You can spend the whole day fulfilling the goal of "wanting" but never find the time to get the car washed.

Stated effectively it goes this way..."I'm taking the car to the car wash at 11 o'clock. The goal word is "taking"...an external event.

A well-stated goal, likely to get done, is put in **external action words** such as "taking the car in" and not in **internal states** such as "I want" or "I would like to."

A schedule that reads...

- **Call** Joe at nine a.m.
- **Take** the car in for an oil change at 9:45
- **Return** yesterday's calls while waiting for car
- **Go** to lunch with Father Dave...
- **Make** hospital rounds.

Is different from...

- **Try** and get back to Joe sometime today if there's time..
- **See if** there's time to take the car for an oil change...
- **Try** and get back to yesterday's callers...
- **Meet** Father Dave for lunch.
- **Try** to get to the hospital.

The only accomplishment on that list was most likely 'meeting' Father Dave for lunch. If it's a good lunch, with a glass of wine or two, the hospital rounds will probably roll over to tomorrow. As for the other things before lunch... "trying" to do something is extremely difficult, impossible really. Because...

There are no behaviors for "trying". There are no actions for trying. It is an interior word that is no different in effect from "wanting" or "wishing" or "hoping". Test it out for yourself.

Put some object on the floor and try to pick it up. You can't do it.

"But," you say, "I picked it up."

Well, yes you did. But the instruction was to "try" to pick it up, not to actually pick it up. To pick it up is an action.

There's a big difference in the outcome when you "try" to pick an object up off the floor, (and you may even "try" harder)...and when you actually pick something up off the floor. **There are no actions for "trying"**. Trying is internal...wishing or hoping.

When you tell someone you will try to get back to them, you have made no commitment whatsoever to do that. It is not a goal. There are no behaviors for trying to get back to someone. Same thing when someone says that to you. You probably won't hear from them.

So to make a **commitment** to achieving a goal, it must be stated in a positive action word that describes your behavior in the external world and not in an inner state word like "want" and "try". When someone tells you they tried very hard to get back to you, but there just wasn't time... **you will know that they did nothing at all.**

On the other hand...

A person who says "I tried to call you three times but your line was busy so I left you a message" is not being accurate. They didn't try at all. They actually called you three times...and they actually left a message.

Using the word try when you should be making an active commitment, is when the word means nothing at all in terms of taking action.

Section VII

Why most meetings waste time

The official idea about meetings is that they are gatherings to solve a problem, formulate a plan of action, brainstorm new ideas...and so forth.

The major reason that meetings consume so much time and are replays of previous meetings is because...

It's almost always the case that the wrong people are at the meeting.

Let's say you are a religious community in transition. Your old apostolate of teaching in catholic grammar schools is pretty well finished. The original teachers are aging and retiring to the motherhouse. The newcomers are often professional women who have earning capacity from nursing, business, and other professions. Everyone seems to be doing their own thing.

Now, the meeting question is... "What is our mission?"

There's a sweet bromide in some women's religious communities and it goes like this..."Everyone has a piece of the wisdom."

That's true. However, when you're brainstorming an idea not every type of wisdom is relevant or useful at a brainstorming meeting. In fact, the presence of irrelevant wisdom can

sidetrack the development of good ideas at a brainstorming meeting.

When you are brainstorming, you need all of those “nutty” creative people who think outside the box and color outside the lines, who write at an angle on lined paper, who think backwards from effect to cause.

It’s reported that Henry Ford who invented the horseless carriage, the motor car, told his engineers to build an internal combustion engine. The engineers reportedly said, “It has never been done.” Ford responded: “Good. Then let’s do it!”

Creative brainstormers are not limited in their thinking to what *is*...they imagine what yet isn’t.

Highly practical individuals who function inside the box and color inside the lines should not be allowed at meetings with such people. Their genius at practicality will be highly useful at another meeting when the “nutty” creative brainstormers are finished with theirs. Just like the practical engineers who had never looked outside the box had to implement Ford’s “nutty” idea that transformed the world.

Let’s use a novelist as an example...and agree that everyone involved has a piece of the wisdom.

- First there is the creative writer who cannot edit her own work to make it marketable. Hemingway was not a particularly good speller.

- Then there is the realist editor who puts the manuscript in shape grammatically, and often conceptually. You may have noted that book writers express heartfelt thanks to their editors (who may not have the creativity to write their own novels).
- Then there is the graphic designer who designs the cover knowing that he must attract your eye within 4 or 5 seconds after the book is on the shelf of the bookstore.
- Then there are the budget people who take an educated guess how many copies to run for the first printing.
- Then there is the marketer who designs the advertising campaign who sets up the book signings and talk show appearances.
- Not to mention all of their assistants.

Now, do you really want all of these people in the same meeting. No way.

Imagine an author writing a thriller, or a love story, and the editor looking over the writer's shoulder saying "that sentence isn't exactly grammatical is it?" No book would ever get written. In fact, one common instruction from writing teachers is not to edit as you write. The editor's wisdom comes later...after the book is on paper.

Or imagine the marketing department people, reading the author's draft and saying "I think we could sell more copies if the train with all those children returning from camp crashed". The marketer's wisdom comes only after the editor gets all the children on the train home safely...their happiness described in good English prose.

Everyone may have a piece of the wisdom, but their particular piece may not be relevant when brainstorming a new vision for a ministry. In fact, what usually happens is that one kind of wisdom begins to veto the other kinds, just as in the example above.

Treasurers of religious congregations are particularly prone to use their wisdom at community brainstorming meetings to veto ideas instead of thinking of ways to implement them with the resources at hand.

The treasurer of a religious congregation at a brainstorming meeting can keep anything from happening "because of the high cost." But cost isn't a factor when you're being creative because **the act of being creative costs nothing**. The treasurer should be on vacation when brainstorming takes place.

So, when brainstorming how to develop a new ministry, for example, or revitalize an old one, you need to save time by having several meetings, each one with the right people.

First, you have a meeting with the creative people who can envisage things that the rest cannot imagine. Get all of their ideas down, each and every one. Let's say the community wants

to build a new monastery with hanging gardens on the edge of a limestone cliff above the sea.

Let the creative ones draw mental pictures for everyone at the meeting and build on each other's beautiful fantasies. For that is what they are...mere fantasies...internal thoughts with no connection to reality.

Everything ever created by humans...like the wheel...started out as just that...a fantasy, an idea, a dream. (Imagine what life would be like if someone in authority said to the inventor of the wheel...no one has ever done that...it's impossible.) So those who do not have soaring imaginations do not belong at this meeting. If they're offended, just let them pout. Their wisdom will be inhibiting at this meeting but will be crucial elsewhere. It will be the job of those with practical wisdom to connect those ideas to reality.

Second, you have a meeting with all of the realist 'editors' who may not be able to dream up a building, but can take a way out idea and reshape it (**but not veto it**) into a doable form.

This would be the architect who can give shape and dimension to this fabulous monastery with its hanging gardens. And an engineer who can make sure the building doesn't fall off the edge of the cliff into the sea in a heavy gale. They don't veto the idea of a monastery with hanging gardens, they just show what it would take to be built...safely. They externalize the creative fantasies from the creative dreamers' meeting and put them on paper with lines and numbers.

Third, you have a meeting with the treasurer, who is not welcome to veto the monastery or the hanging gardens, but who must use her wisdom to find the required materials at the best price and on the best terms within a budget. She may have a meeting and consult with the architect and the engineer to get their views on such matters and leads to good building suppliers.

If all of those people, each with their own piece of wisdom, are at the same meeting, the monastery with the hanging gardens would never be built.

This format for meetings saves time because it keeps things moving toward the goal of realizing (making real) the monastery of the hanging gardens...or whatever else you are trying to birth into being.

So, all meetings, whether it is to build a new monastery, or to develop a ministry to the homeless, or to design a religious formation program...among other things, should have **first** the creative people (which may be a single charismatic individual), **second**, the know how to do it people, and **third**, the get it done people. Each group brainstorms in its appropriate way and does not interfere with or veto the brainstorming of the others.

Having everyone at the same meeting is like a jig-saw puzzle just dumped out of the box onto the table. All the pieces are relevant but they are not usefully arranged. You start separating the pieces of the seascape from the clouds and the animals from the

machines, the flowers from the grass. By organizing the pieces into relevant groups, the puzzle is realized.

Meetings are a huge time waster, especially in non-profit organizations where time is not considered the equivalent of money...as it is in a for-profit company.

But, wasting time in a religious non-profit organization may prevent the ministry from being developed timely in order to bring the minister and people closer to God.

Another big time waster at meetings is attending to needs for food and drink. Coffee and donuts tend to make meetings social events when their purpose is quite different. When Avis, the car rental company, was trying to challenge Hertz, the number one car rental company, the Avis CEO held all meetings standing up, no cushy chairs, no smoking, no coffee, no donuts. People accomplished the goal of the meeting quickly.

Section VIII

How needing to be loved wastes time

Being Mr. or Ms. Nice Guy.

Beloved pastors may find that they are in 'demand' more than they should be.

People may like just to be around them. So, an appointment may run overtime, or invitations may be pressed on the pastor.

If the pastor wants to be loved he may find he has a day of accomplishing little because he did not know how to, or maybe didn't want to, end a conversation with a parish chatterbox, turn down an invitation, or end a meeting.

Mr. and Ms. Nice guy often over commit themselves.

This can have unpleasant consequences in relationships when they don't live up to someone's expectations and deliver what they promised. We've all had experiences with companies who seem overcommitted when they don't live up to their advertising and don't deliver what they promise.

People who say "I'm a people person" may find that the administrative side of ministry, its support side, gets neglected...because there isn't time.

Even if you are a “people person” you are more often doing support activities for ministry than **ministry itself...which is religious activity that brings both minister and people closer to God.**

Ministers need to get their personal needs met from family and personal friends. If they use time effectively in ministry, they will have plenty of time for relationships that meet their need to be loved. Just look through the gospels to see all the time Jesus took to relax with his friends.

This is not to say that ministers should be abrupt and uncivil. Not at all. But, when their personal needs for affirmation from parishioners is excessive, problems can arise. For example...

There was a pastor who was loved by all because he just couldn't say no.

What this amounted to was that any program in the parish could charge materials that it needed without a purchase order. Individuals just spent parish money without authorization.

When the pastor left for a new assignment, the new pastor found the parish nearly sixty thousand dollars in debt from a constant stream of unauthorized charges.

The pastor's need to be considered kindly overrode the efficient use of money in the parish. And having to reevaluate all of the

parish programs and how they were administered took up extraordinary amounts of the new pastor's time.

Summary

We've covered the following things that undermine effective time management in ministry and provided suggested solutions. It is important to note that the examples are illustrative, you can and should use your own procedures and examples to work with the principle involved in each of our examples.

- We reviewed the scriptural mandate for effective time management in ministry.
- We reviewed how effective time management can create enthusiasm and a sense of well-being, a sense of competency and a sense of enthusiasm for carrying out and developing one's ministry.
- We defined effective time management and how poor time management creates stress that leads to burnout in ministry.
- We advocated a positive role for procrastination in effective time management.
- We reviewed the essential role that goals play in effective time management and how time is wasted without them.
- We talked about the necessary language for goal-setting and how "trying" to do something is a commitment to not doing it.
- We showed how to create a goal so that it's different from a mere wish...by using external action verbs and avoiding

internal mental states such as hoping, wishing and especially “trying”.

- We reviewed administrative time-wasters such as meetings where all the wrong people are brought together.
- We talked about personality time-wasters such as the need to be perceived as loving and caring and how people can use that to defeat your need to stay focused and on time.

And if you want to create more than 24 hours in your day, we talked about the need to avoid micromanaging everyone and every situation. Delegating authority and decision-making uses other people’s time effectively in achieving the goals of the ministry.

Now use effective time management strategies to prevent job burnout in your ministry so you can continue to be a blessing in the lives of God’s people.

Please drop us a line with your comments and suggestions at the following address...

<http://www.boundaries-for-effective-ministry.org>