

# Taking Control

*Some days, it can seem like time is flying by and we're doomed for a crash landing. Here are some tips on regaining control.*

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Thinking back to my time as a college undergrad, I remember often waiting until the last moment to finish an important term paper, finalize some research, or study for an upcoming exam. It wasn't the best system, but I always seemed to get the job done.

When I began my first job as an athletic director, though, it became clear pretty quickly that the "Collegiate model" for time management wouldn't fly. The sheer volume of work we do every day does not allow us to put things aside until the last minute without some serious consequences. I need to get a handle on my time instead of allowing it to handle me.

Now, 20 years later, I've developed a full toolbox of ideas to make the most of my work hours, the best of which I'll share here. These tools have helped me control my life-and my time.

**Avoid procrastination:** There are many things that occur during the day that, as athletic directors, are outside of our control. Completing tasks does not need to be one of them. The best way to tackle the projects on your desk – rather than ignoring them for as long as possible – is to prioritize and organize.

A former superintendent I once worked for used a great organizational technique called a "Tickler File." The file folder contained a variety of open-ended issues or situations that needed his attention sometime soon, placed in order of most to least important.

At the start of each work week, he would begin the process of going through the folder by updating or finalizing as many of the issues as he could. If he couldn't immediately bring closure to an item, he contacted those effected by the end of the week to let them

know he was working on it. His goal was to solve the issues and rotate them out of the folder as quickly as possible. The “Tickler File” was a great way for my colleague to stay organized and progress throughout the work week.

**Learn to delegate:** By nature, many athletic directors like to be in total control. We feel the need to do things ourselves to make sure they’re done right. But, in reality, you will drone in your duties if you don’t delegate. Even if it makes you uneasy at first, you need to train people to help you with some of your less important duties-and trust them to do the task correctly.

One way to utilize assistants and event supervisors (and not worry that they will drop the ball) is to provide them with checklists and resources. For example, when someone covers a game for me, I give them a detailed list of duties and emergency phone numbers that will help them supervise the event. If they make a mistake, I turn it into a teaching moment and give the person a vote of confidence so they won’t make the error again.

**Communicate efficiently:** It’s easy for our entire day to be filled with answering e-mails and phone messages if we let it. But constant interruptions make our work much less efficient.

Instead, put systems in place to answer people’s most basic questions. Offer updated information on a Web site and through the voicemail system, insist that your coaches send e-mail updates to parents, and, if possible, have an administrative assistant answer the phone.

For the e-mails and calls that require you response, try to set aside a specific time during both the morning and afternoon to answer them and stick to that schedule. On your voice mail recording, tell folks your will get back to them within 24 hours, and let them know where else they may be able to obtain the information they are seeking.

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Similarly, don’t be a slave to an open door policy. There’s nothing wrong with shutting your door once in a while to get things accomplished. If you have an administrative assistant, ask him or her to screen your visitors when you have a pressing deadline.

**Make lists:** As you start each day, consider making three lists. The first list covers the things that you must get done that day. The second list addresses items you’d like to get done if you have time. The third list contains matters you’ll have to get to eventually. The goal of this system is to rotate the items on the second and third list to the first list as soon as possible.

**Clear your mind:** Sometimes, a stressful situation arises and we find ourselves struggling to accomplish anything. A colleague of mine uses an interesting method to clear his mind in these situations. He simply grabs a clipboard, walks out of his office, and sets out for a 10 – to 15 – minute stroll around his building or campus.

The walk clears his mind and allows him to stretch his legs, while giving him an opportunity to physically remove himself from the phone, computer and other people for a few minutes. The clipboard is simply a prop that makes it appear he is on a mission of some kind and shouldn't be stopped or bothered.

**Reward yourself:** We rarely get a pat on the back for completing a project or handling a tricky parent problem, so we need to be our own cheerleaders from time to time. Think of something to reward yourself with when appropriate-maybe it's spending some quality time with your children, meeting your spouse at a nice restaurant, or heading out to the golf course. Sometimes, it can be as simple as grabbing your favourite ice cream bar from the cafeteria. It's never a waste of time to take better care of ourselves mentally.

The workload for the typical athletic director can be overwhelming and each of us must remember that, even with our best efforts, we can't always get it all done in one day. Utilizing your precious time more efficiently, however, can help you to be in a better frame of mind and make you a more effective athletic director.