Feel there is too much to do and too little time? Try some

TIME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

How we manage time and other resources has a large impact on how easily we conquer our to-do list and complete projects.

Luckily, there are some great practices that can help improve time management. These include developing a **project plan, setting priorities, thinking before acting,** and **planning for down time**.

Time is just one of many resources property owners and managers must allocate. Here are some strategies and ideas to help make the most of your precious time.

Time management worksheets

In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), Stephen Covey outlines a time management worksheet. This can help individuals, a family, or a manager and employees assess where they spend most of their time (Figure 1).

Covey encourages individuals to shift their emphasis away from activities that are not-important-but-urgent (quadrant III) or not-urgent-and-not-important (quadrant IV) to activities that are important-but-not-urgent (quadrant II).

The time management worksheet offers a good way to assess how you and others spend most of your time. Working through the worksheet helps develop a list of tasks and jobs on which time is spent and what important tasks have been completed in the past month, season, or year. Finally, spend time discussing where each person placed the majority of his or her activities.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	**Quadrant I** Crises Pressing problems Deadline-driven projects	**Quadrant II** Prevention, Relationship building, Recognizing new opportunities, Planning, Recreation
Not Important	**Quadrant III** Interruptions, Some calls, Some mail, Some reports, Some meetings, Pressing matters, Popular activities	**Quadrant IV** Trivia, Busy work, Some mail, Some phone calls, Time wasters, Pleasant activities, No-brainers

Adapted from Covey (1989)

Figure 1. *Time Management Worksheet | Applied Risk Management in Agriculture*

Resource coordination

Resource coordination involves breaking plans into specific action steps, scheduling the order of those steps, and developing contingency plans. End-point scheduling, optimist/pessimist scheduling, calendars, and Gantt and PERT charts are some of the tools for scheduling action steps.

Time management is critical for effective resource coordination. The time management matrix provides a method for thinking about how time is used and which activities might be prioritized.

Resource coordination tools

End-point (backward) scheduling

Estimating the amount of time it will take to complete a project or task and work backward to the present time is a good way to develop a schedule for activities. The use of end-point scheduling requires developing the schedule to start with the time they wish to finish a project or task rather than the time the project can start. The finish time and date is most important with this tool.

Optimist/pessimist scheduling

Under this approach, first determine the optimistic parameter. How much time would it take to accomplish the project or task if

Project Plan for _____

Project Steps	Date
Project completion	9/xx/XX
Step 5	7/xx/XX
task 5.2	7/xx/XX
task 5.1	6/xx/XX
Step 4	5/xx/XX
Step 2-3	4/xx/XX
Step 1	3/xx/XX
task 1.3	3/xx/XX
task 1.2	2/15/XX
task 1.1	1/10/XX
Today	xx/xx/XX

Figure 2. *Example End-point Schedule*

Estimated completion of early and late completion of tasks

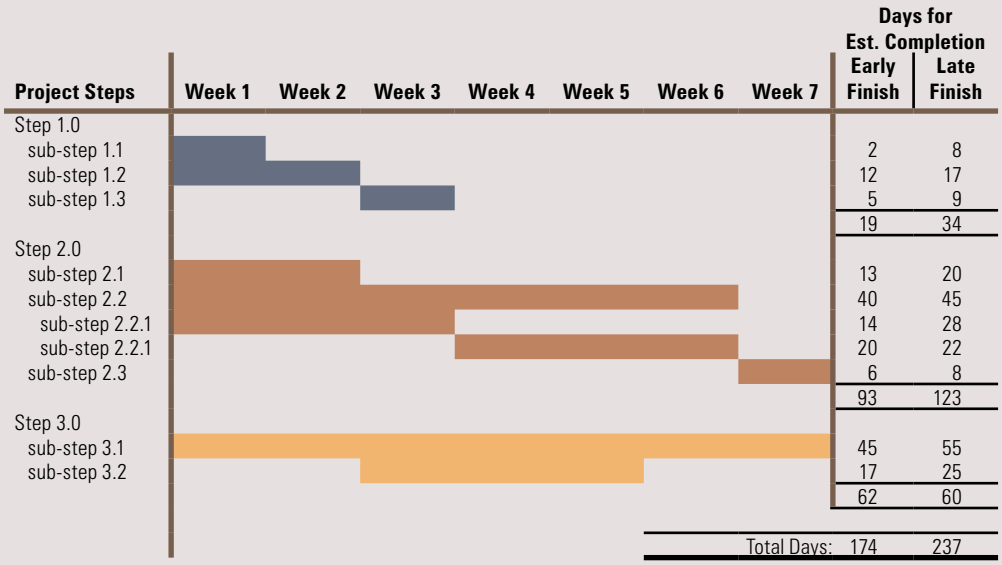


Figure 3. *Example Optimist/pessimist Schedule. Bars indicate the estimated period for a particular task. Bars lie between early and late estimated finish.*

Example Gantt Chart

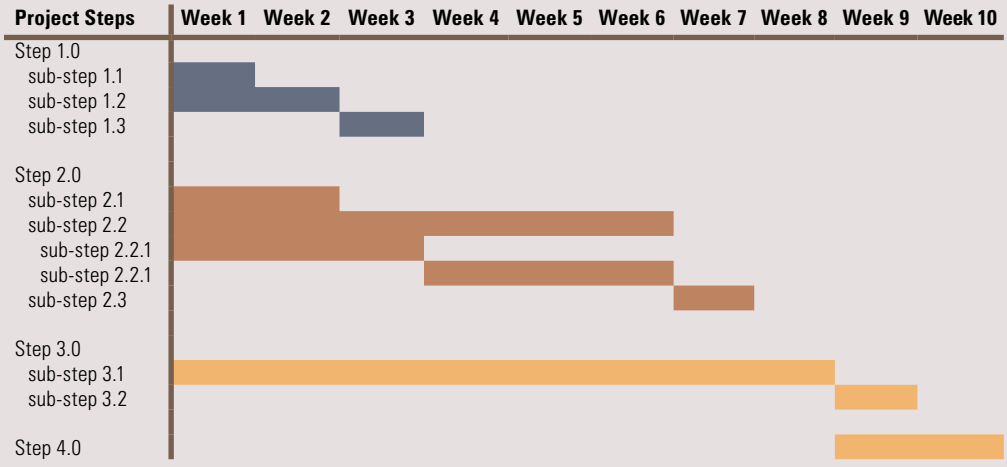


Figure 4. *Example Gantt Chart*

everything went well? Then determine the pessimistic boundary by asking how much time would it take to accomplish the project or task if everything went poorly. Next, an upper and lower boundary of time estimates can be set with the assumption not everything that could go wrong will go wrong and that all that could go right will not go right.

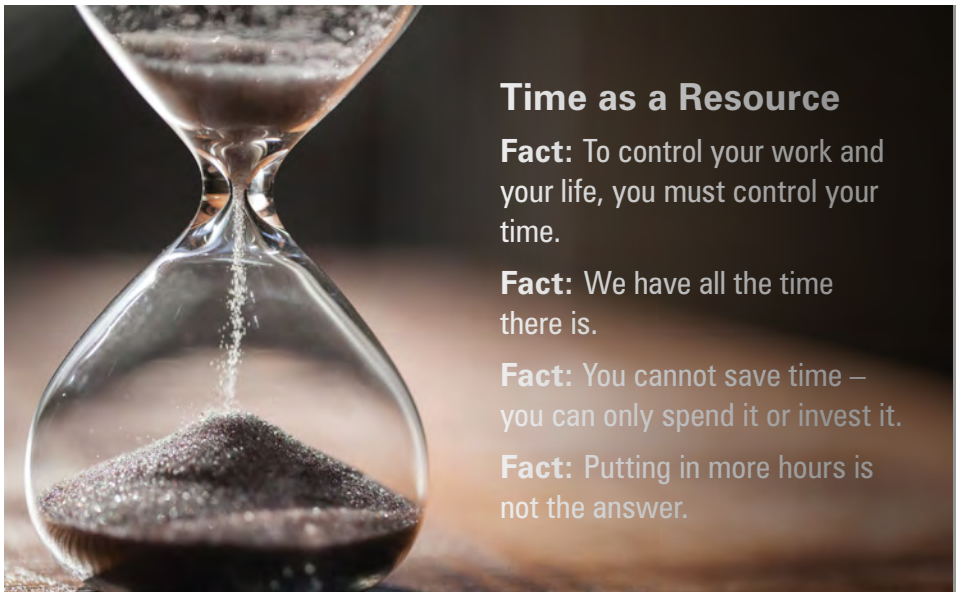
A time frame can be set and then focus attention on the time within the boundary.

Calendars

Electronic and hard copies are useful for planning out time. A desk-top calendar that depicts the entire week allows writing in when various action steps must be accomplished. A pocket calendar is not as detailed but is easily carried. A wall calendar that offers a month-by-month view provides at a glance when action steps should be accomplished. Day planners are more complex but allow a planner to review several projects and plan at the same time. Many calendar apps are now available for smartphones or tablets; planning tools are no more than a couple of clicks away and remain available even when in the field. However, hard copy calendars can still be useful as a backup to technology or for those who find visualizing the flow of work easier in this format.

Gantt charts

A Gantt chart depicts the beginning and ending dates for an event, the sequencing of events, and the extent to which an event is completed. As action steps are



accomplished, they are noted on the chart, and barriers are identified. The timing of action steps is most important in Gantt charts. The technique involves graphically laying out the sequence of steps or events that must be accomplished to complete a project or task. The time to complete each event is clearly specified, and a critical path is determined. The critical path is the longest sequence between the series of events. It is called the critical path because any delay in this path will delay the entire project.

PERT chart

The Project Evaluation and Review Technique, or PERT, presents the plan for accomplishing a particular project by outlining the steps required, the time estimated for each task, and the minimum time needed to complete the entire project. PERT was developed to simplify the planning and scheduling of large and complex projects and is more of an event-oriented technique rather than a start/completion date approach.

Action planning

The Action Planning Worksheet helps translate complex projects into the specific action steps needed for operational planning. Operational plans can help resource coordination and tracking progress.

The Action Planning Worksheet provides blanks for specific action steps, dates for completion of each step, the person or persons responsible, and the tracking or measuring system that will be used to determine if the actions have occurred as planned.

Once filled out, the Action Planning Worksheet can be very helpful in assigning specific task responsibilities by individual and by set of activities across individuals for a week, a month, or a season of operation. In addition, the worksheet can be used to describe operational plans in the detail needed to allow active tracking of progress toward the listed objectives.

Other management resources

As noted earlier, resource acquisition and application are extremely important to the success of any enterprise; however, in some ways these represent easy aspects of management. Coordinating resources as plans unfold takes more talent and is, perhaps, more difficult to balance.

Effective and timely communication is another important dimension to this component, as are adequate planning and consideration of possible contingencies.

Additional resources for planning and management are listed below. One that includes an outline of a strategic planning framework and how this can be tied to day-to-day management decisions and time management is *Applied Risk Management in Agriculture,* as well as the companion Risk Navigator website (RightRisk.org).

Look under resources in this story and you'll see **John Hewlett's** name. He is a University of Wyoming Extension farm and ranch management specialist in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics and can be reached at hewlett@uwyo.edu or (307) 766-2166.

Resources

RightRisk.org. *Risk Navigator: Strategic Risk Management*. https://RightRisk.org > Products tab. 2002-2020.

Hoag, D., D. Griffith, J.P. Hewlett, C. Keske, J. Parsons, J. Pritchett, A. Sprague, E. Fathelrahman, and J. Ascough. 2010. *Applied Risk Management in Agriculture*. CRC Press. Taylor & Francis Group. New York.

Rosenberg, H.R., R. Carkner, J.P. Hewlett, L. Owen, T. Teegerstrom, J.E. Tranel and R.R. Weigel. 2002. *Agricultural Help Wanted: Guidelines for Managing Agricultural Labor*. Western Farm Management Committee.

Smith, D.K. 1999. *Make Success Measurable! A Mindbook-Workbook for Setting Goals and Taking Action.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.