

The Time Management Ladder

Michael J. Sexton and Karen Dawn Dill Switzer

Indicated here are several valuable rules of time management. These, according to these authors, will help to elevate the efforts of school persons toward efficiency and effectiveness in their professional and personal endeavors.

Once there was a school that ran like clockwork. The principal was efficient, the teachers worked hard, and the school responded well to any crisis.

But in a nearby district, there was a different sort of school. The principal and the supervisors were efficient, but others did not particularly notice that. Others noticed instead the quality time spent talking with teachers and students. The teachers worked hard, but others did not particularly comment on that. They said that the teachers were creative, and the students said that they really liked school. There was a stimulating environment in which creative forces were at work together to attempt new ideas.

What makes the difference between the just-satisfactory school described first and the exciting school?

One has only an educational manager, while the other has a true educational leader. The same quality separates the principal or supervisor who just makes it through each day from the one who strives for excellence and creativity. We can "feel the vibes" when we are working with a true educational leader.

What constitutes the critical difference between the two extremes? There is an identifiable distinction between true educational leaders and others. The distinction is: How they use their time. The leaders use time to their own advantage. Certain routine functions are handled quickly and efficiently so that more time can be spent on subjects that the educational leader perceives as having the greatest import for the school.

In this article we will explore how principals and supervisors use their time productively. We will identify how they use their time efficiently to function as good managers, and then rise another step higher, using time effectively to serve as leaders among teachers, students, and colleagues.

We could illustrate the pathway to leadership by the Time Management Ladder in Figure 1. Educational leaders use their time constructively to go up the ladder to achieve new heights. The objective is to spend as much time as possible in the realm of professional goal functions—doing the #1's. When principals and supervisors are approaching tomorrow's educational concerns on today's ideas and energy, while setting and implementing goals, they are on the top level of the Time Management Ladder.

Clockwatching Went Out With the Charleston

We're not clockwatchers. That technique was popular back in the days of Frederick W. Taylor's scientific management. Time and motion studies were used to observe all the movements involved in a particular job and then determining the best set of motions leading to the greatest efficiency for that job. Production standards were set as the stopwatches clicked in an effort at planning the largest daily task possible for each worker.

But how can we claim not to be clockwatchers, and still be concerned with time? The key is that we are concerned with *quality* time and productive time. And that key unlocks the door to time for oneself and time for one's students.

Educational Leaders vs. Educational Managers

Examine Figure 2 for examples of the three steps on the Time Management Ladder. Notice that a school can exist and function relatively efficiently if a good manager handles the everyday #3's and the critical or crisis #2's well. However, unless administrators in the school are taking time to formulate and deal with their #1's, then the school cannot rise to heights beyond just-satisfactory.

But all who dwell on #3's and #2's are not efficient. Do you recognize the portrait of the busy supervisor who is swamped in #3's and claims to be behind in work every day within ten minutes after arriving? This supervisor can work frantically and crank out memoranda and call meetings that do nothing except perpetuate the system. This is a case of one's work interfering with one's job.

The point is that we must rise to the top of the Time Management Ladder. But how do supervisors and principals find the time for accomplishing those creative #1's? First, they must deal with their #3's and #2's as quickly and efficiently as possible. As we suggested in the October issue of *Educational Leadership*,¹ it is important to choose the best administrative style for the situation. For example, routine institutional functions such as opening and disseminating the mail demand the authoritarian mode, which is the most efficient and time-saving style. Similarly, in the case of a critical function such as a fight in the classroom when

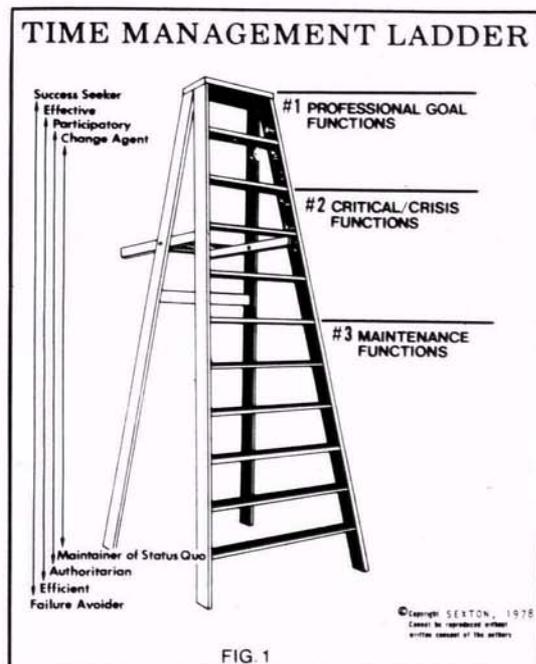


FIG. 1

administrators do not want input or feedback, they should operate in the authoritarian mode. Combining skills at time-saving administrative style with skills at effective delegating and effective use of time, they will have greater opportunity to move up on the Time Management Ladder to self-impose those #1's that have far-reaching effect and greatest import for the school. In workshops, the authors conduct on time management and administrative style,² principals and supervisors have requested concrete rules of time management in order to have the time to think about #1's.

Rules of Time Management

A. Avoid Time-Wasting Habits

Let's start with what not to do. Our research

¹ See Michael J. Sexton and Karen Dawn Dill Switzer. "Educational Leadership: No Longer A Potpourri," *Educational Leadership* 35(1): 19-24; October 1977.

² Information on workshops may be obtained by writing Dr. Michael J. Sexton, Department of Educational Administration, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843.

has shown that the areas listed below are the most commonly recognized time-wasters. This check list has been developed to help the practicing supervisor avoid pitfalls of time-wasting.

1. — No. 3-type telephone call interruptions
2. — Phone conversations longer than five minutes
3. — Visitors who drop in with #3 priority
4. — Ineffective delegation of duties
5. — Trying to do too much
6. — Procrastinating at any level on the Time Management Ladder
7. — Meetings and assignments that are your #3's and your boss's #1's
8. — Meetings that involve more people than necessary
9. — Setting unrealistic deadlines—or not setting a deadline at all
10. — Using a general meeting to take roll
11. — Encouraging "give and take" dis-

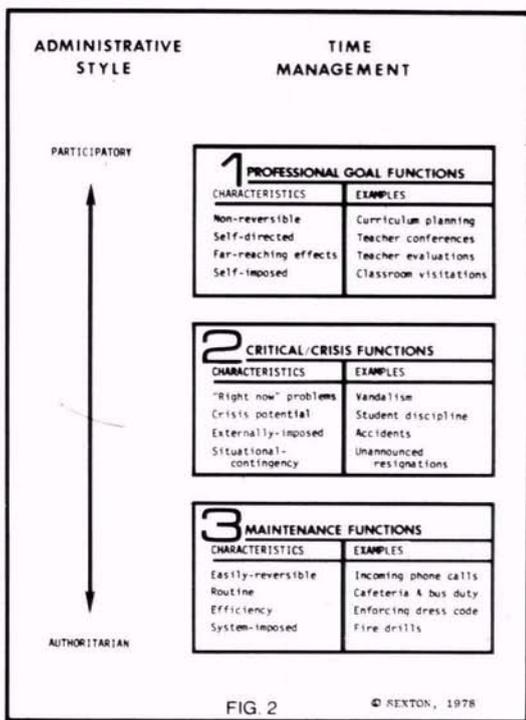


Figure 3: Time Management Weekly Log

Beside each hour of the day, write what you did most of that time. Follow the example at the left of the log as a guide. Then, at the end of each working day, classify your time according to this code:

- #1 = Professional Goal Functions
 #2 = Critical/Crisis Functions
 #3 = Maintenance Functions
 P = Personal Activity

Example	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8 #3 Open Mail Organize	8	8	8	8	8
9 #2 Appl. I called w/Staff re	9	9	9	9	9
10 #2 Weekend Fire	10	10	10	10	10
11 #3 Answer Correspondence	11	11	11	11	11
12 — Lunch	12	12	12	12	12
1 #1 Called Staff re. Sys. plan	1	1	1	1	1
2 P Dentist	2	2	2	2	2
3 #3 Committee Central Office	3	3	3	3	3
4 #3 Met with Parent	4	4	4	4	4
#3 Dictate Mo. Report					

Totals: Count the hours you spent this week on:

#1 _____
 #2 _____
 #3 _____
 P _____

Your goal for next week:

#1 _____
 #2 _____
 #3 _____
 P _____

© Sexton 1977

Over 50 years
of service to education:



discussion with people who have #3 ideas or not encouraging such discussion with people who have #1 ideas

12. — Wasting time attempting to become more efficient at what you should not be doing in the first place.

B. Control Parallel Ladders

Parallel to your professional ladder is at least one additional demand on your time—your personal ladder. By realistically appraising the steps on your personal ladder, you can truly prioritize your work day. If the children must be picked up from preschool at a certain time daily, this routine #3 maintenance function must be accounted for. Dental problems could present a crisis situation demanding immediate #2 attention. And you should often plan for #1 personal goal functions such as career advancement.

You should consciously be aware of your personal ladder so that its contents are prioritized appropriately along with the contents of your professional ladder. For a professional, this means that tending to certain personal matters during

the work week is normal—you won't have time to feel guilty! But on the other hand, this means that your time must remain as *quality* time, regardless of the parallel ladder upon which you are operating.

Most supervisors do not have a clear idea of how much time they do spend during the work week on #1's, #2's, and #3's from their parallel ladders. We have found that the only way to find out is to keep a brief log for one week. There is no need to write down everything you do (who except the inactive could do that!). Instead, write down your primary activity each hour, and then at the end of the working day classify your time spent, as shown on the example in Figure 3.

C. Maintain High Visibility

As you know, a good leader is the one who seems to be seen everywhere and seems to see everything. Taking the time to be visible must be a professional #1. Supervisors who insulate themselves from teachers and students will not be able to stay in touch with the reality of the school.

This rule of effective time management is probably not news to you. What *is* important about this rule is to think of it in terms of being a #1 on the Time Management Ladder. Then you can efficiently work through your routine #3's, in order to have time to maintain high visibility. Notice on the Time Management Ladder that when you deal with your #1's such as high visibility, you are concerned with effectiveness, and your administrative style is therefore participatory in nature. [4]



Michael J. Sexton is Assistant Professor of Educational Administration, and Karen Dawn Dill Switzer is Student Development Coordinator, Division of Student Services; both at Texas A & M University, College Station.

Copyright © 1978 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.