

## **BASIC TIME MANAGEMENT**

### **By Michael Dean**

“Captain, I need more time!”

Mr. Scott often exclaimed these words to Captain Kirk on the old Star Trek television series as he was hurriedly trying to repair the ship before it blew up or crashed into a planet. We in the music business often find ourselves feeling the same way. However, we almost always have enough time to do everything we need or even want to do. The problem is usually with our time usage or management. The following are some ideas that I believe will help a musician (or a person in any field) to manage his/her time better and accomplish more. I have grouped these ideas into three categories: *Background & Approach to Time Management*, *Practical Applications* (“Do These Things”), and *Top Ten Time Tips*.

### **Background & Approach To Time Management**

*Time Management is Important.* This is probably the most important concept in this article. A commitment to ongoing improvements in time use can produce spectacular results. Just thinking about managing time can be a real breakthrough for many who constantly “fly by the seat of their pants” time-wise.

*Goal-Setting.* This vital area deserves an article of its own; however, for our purpose here I will only briefly mention it. The setting of short, middle, and long-range goals is a critical factor in time management. Without a target, how can you hit the bull’s-eye?

*Planning: Get a plan and follow it!* When planning our time use, it is often difficult to decide on the best schedule. This difficulty can result in inertia and failure to follow good time management principles. Some may never plan at all! It is my conviction that results come from activity not inactivity. Further, it is easier to change direction if you are moving than if you are standing still. Therefore, I suggest devising a good (or even so-so) plan and DO IT! I have found that having a plan and following it (even if it’s not *the* best) results in great success.

*Ruts are Good.* We live our lives in a routine. When was the last time you looked at the number on your house? The key is to make sure you have a good time-using routine. Also, it is imperative to continually improve on a good time routine. Left alone, most things get worse not better. (Does the house get cleaner by itself with the kids at home?) We need to constantly work on good time habits.

### **Practical Applications (“Do These Things”)**

The following is a practical way to organize your time. Some may find it useful to invest in a fancy twenty-dollar time planner; however, I do not think it is always necessary. Some simple tools can pay big results.

*Get Tools:* Find or make a one-page time chart that shows all the waking hours (6 a.m. to midnight or so) for one week. (My wife, Anne-Leslie, created some nice ones for me with her word processor). Next, get a pocket calendar that shows a month at a time. Finally, buy a big pile of file folders.

*Fill It Out:* Make several copies of your time chart and put them in one of your file folders. (You can use file folders to organize almost everything.) Take one of the charts and fill in every place you *have* to be – classes to teach or attend, lunch appointments, rehearsals, concerts, faculty meetings, etc. (You can transfer appointments, etc. from your pocket calendar.) This will show you your spare time. You can now fill in the remainder of the sheet with items from your “To Do” list (see below). (Follow the rule: *Plan your time off first.* Things such as faith, family, friends, football, and fishing {golf for some, to be sure!} are obviously an important part of our lives and cannot be neglected.)

*Make a “To Do” List:* On the back of your time sheet make a prioritized list of all the tasks you want to accomplish. Put each task, or *action item*, into one of three categories: A, B, or C. A is for things that “must be done, no matter what.” B is for actions that “need to be done, maybe not right now, but soon.” And C is for tasks that “should get done, but can wait.” There are many different ways to do a prioritization; however, the key is to use some kind of system and adjust it as you go.

*Urgent vs. Important:* Be sure to know whether an action item is urgent (must be done NOW!), important (has great benefit), or is both. Good time users spend their time doing important things and not just putting out fires.

### **Top Ten Time Tips**

(Not necessarily in this order)

1. Handle your mail only once. Read it now or read it later (not both!).
2. Television is your enemy (at least as far as time is concerned). Now there is a new enemy – the computer, especially the Internet and World Wide Web (that little hour glass is your life slipping away!).
3. Practice/study/work where you cannot be interrupted by the phone. If possible, turn off your pager and cellular phone.
4. Learn how to nicely get rid of guests (especially if they drop by your practice room or office to just “chat”).
5. Always strive to improve your time management skills. Read a book on the subject periodically (I recommend Ron Fry’s *Manage Your Time* published by Career Press) or attend a lecture.
6. Eat right/exercise/sleep 8 hours every night. “Every hour of sleep before midnight counts as two” is a good old rule to follow.
7. Recruit help. You do not have to do every chore yourself.
8. Carefully consider goals and goal-setting. Remember the Chinese proverb: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”
9. **Just do it!** Be disciplined. The more you are disciplined, the more disciplined you will become.
10. On failure: If you fall down, don’t just lie there and complain, get up and keep going.