

When there's never enough time... What Gets Done Next?

A Department Chair's Survival Guide:
Pacing yourself, using your resources,
and other useful insights into the job

Presented by Jim Gray
Florida Atlantic University

In Many Ways
Your Life has Changed, since
you became the “Boss”

But there are things you can do to
keep control of most of it.



Now you are:

- "Strapped to the desk"
- Regimented into an endless series of meetings
- On call to everybody with an "issue"
- Besieged with phone calls and
- Now getting five times the number of emails, with half of them marked "urgent" or something like that.

It's enough to make anybody cranky!

But there are some things you can do to keep control of most of it.

First, Remember Something important:

Every problem you have ever conquered before has strengthened your skills to manage this new mess—and you did not get in this position being stupid.

Well, maybe you did say yes when offered the job...

But, let's be analytical for a few moments.



There are some very identifiable categories of things that seem to have changed...Almost Overnight:

Relationships

Perceptions

Environment

All of these affect your ability to manage time

Changed Relationships:

- With your Peers
- With the Staff
- With upper Administration
- With your Students
- With the Community

Changed Perceptions:

- Others' perceptions of you
- Your perceptions of others
- Relative importance of tasks
- Critical attention to details
- Authority and power issues

Changed work environment:

- Interminable meetings
- Crisis of the hour
- New pressures and expectations
- Less personal space, and of course
- Never enough time!

Survival

Now it is becoming vital to your survival to find ways to:

- Maintain control of your work schedule
- Get control over your time
- Preserve your sanity...whatever is left of that!

First, let's look at areas where **Relationships** have changed:

- With your Peers
- With the Staff
- With upper Administration
- With your Students
- With the Community

With Peers:

- No longer a pal,
all of a sudden you are: "The BOSS"
- And because you are now "The BOSS"

This puts you under immediate suspicion
of having gone over to THE DARK SIDE

With Staff:

You are now someone to be *feared*,
not just tolerated

Some don't know how they are supposed to relate to you in
your new role.

It is up to you to put them at ease...

With Administration:

- You are now one of them, but they are not sure about you either!

With Students:

- You are now thought of as having the power to “fix stuff”

With Community:

You are now more of a symbol of the university and of your program than ever before

You also have to think more about what those community stakeholders need from you...

Remember:

- Every one of these relationships is important, but they can also become overwhelming in terms of time commitment.
- Here is where we have to start to be “stingy” with time, in order to save enough of it for the really important stuff.
- The urgent priorities will always horn in, but you really have to work to fit in the important things that matter for the longer term.

Your Work Environment

- Personal space and time
- Control of your calendar
- Control of your time
- Preserving your sanity (what's left of it)

This is where it Pays to be Intentional

Calendaring:

- If others have access to your calendar, set boundaries
- Be fastidious about blocking time for serious mental focus
- What time of day are you at your sharpest?
- Set that time aside for the really intensive / contemplative
- Are there regular meetings that require your attendance?
- Block time for these, but be selfish about your availability.

Open Door Policy or Not?

- Really depends on your ability to re-focus after an interruption (or twelve in a row)
- Finger in the air
- Three minute egg
- Open a new note

Attributions are going to be made about your motives...

- Even when you sneeze!
- So just get used to it
- And for goodness sake, stop worrying about what other people will think
- Here is a truth about managing your time to your own advantage that you can take to the bank...

"If you knew how **SELDOM**
other people think about
you...

You would worry **LESS** about
WHAT they think of you."

Oh, and by the way...

Here are some other charming aspects of your new situation:

Students now expect:

- Instantaneous response
- Absolute accuracy
- Unfailing courtesy
- Perfect diplomacy
...and of course...
- Fairness as they see it

Faculty now expect:

- Instantaneous response
- Absolute accuracy
- Unfailing courtesy
- Perfect diplomacy
- ...along with...
- Fairness as they see it

And just guess what your
Dean now expects:

- Instantaneous response
- Absolute accuracy
- Unfailing courtesy
- Perfect diplomacy
...and "Oh, by the way" ...
- Peace in the department

Controlling your time and energy
is not going to be nearly as easy
as it used to be...

Control over your time
is not going to be nearly as easy
as it used to be...

“got a minute?”

YES, but **ONLY**
if its **URGENT**
right now...

Strategy tip:

For Repeat Offenders,

I keep a special prop in my desk drawer





However, the problem is NOT just TIME.
It's Available MEMORY:

You cannot possibly remember all this stuff; yet...
You are expected to have it instantly available, always!

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You are now “official”

and that means...

There is no longer any such thing as
“off the record”

DON'T KID YOURSELF. EVER.

There are no “PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS” anymore

Pointers Collected by watching the best:

1. Delegation—when possible,
Always encourage others to take responsibility
for their own issues and solutions.
2. Relationships—maintain them carefully
they are a prime asset.
3. Trust—must NEVER be violated.
4. Support your subordinates and faculty colleagues
5. Follow-Up fastidiously and reliably

Useful phrases:

Use these whenever you can...

- Would it be possible...
- Can this wait until tomorrow?
- I have about three minutes, will that be enough time?
- What do you think should happen?
- Does this solution consider everyone involved?

Your staff people want meaningful tasks

- Give them specific direction
- Make your expectations clear
- Set a date for completion
- Avoid verbal requests—write it down
- Know your people
- Spend time **really** listening
- Personalize your communications
- Listen first, pause, respond

You may sometimes be the only “adult-in-the-room”

- Keep a list of Critical Dates
- Use the Reminder/Tickler File
- SET Automatic reminders
- Checking up as a regular event
- Don't play “gotcha!”
- Only speak AFTER your brain is fully engaged
- Yes, it is possible to be **Firm and Kind** at the same time!

When it “flows” it can be gratifying





More Great Benchmarks:

- Take control of your office space and time
- Stand up to greet people as they enter
(this exudes courtesy)
- For a short meeting—Never sit back down.
(try this, it usually works)
- When it does not work, walk toward the door!
(this always WORKS!)
- Ask the really tough questions as politely as you can:
- After a while, folks will get your message...

Things I have learnt thru Example

- Have your own data before you even ask the question
- Ask where the data being presented to you originated
- Don't be shy about asking for corroboration/elaboration

- When you delegate responsibility,
 also include confidence:
- "I will support the decisions you make in my absence"

Develop Good Listener Skills

...it also helps to keep good **Notes!**

Sometimes all the other person wants is somebody to listen

- When you think you understand,
ask if your summary is accurate
- What do you absolutely need? / Can you survive without it?
- Always wait until you have “the rest of the story”
 - There is always another perspective to consider
 - Things frequently dissipate in the face of
focused and impartial attention

There are, however,
exceptions to the rules...

URGENT vs. IMPORTANT

- VERY FEW situations are ever “both”
- Many times, by just letting some time pass, a majority of “crises” will resolve themselves without your intervention
- Other times, you have to act quickly and enforce your best judgment, to avoid a regrettable escalation

Knowing how to tell the difference
is a key skill
that you should work to develop

- Unfortunately you will learn this the hard way,
like everyone who has gone before you...

Preparation for the Inevitable

- Types of crisis situations
- Proactive Orientation
- Data in Reserve
- Continuation Planning

It will be OK

- You will get the hang of this, just don't let it go to your head.
- Keep on being yourself, but be more perceptive of others' expectations!
- And Watch out for the "Power Trip"
- Nobody respects a martinet

Wisdom for the Ages

“This too, shall pass”

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The end...

- Beam me up, Scotty!