



Teaching For Success®

Quick Answers

No. 806

Q: There Is Too Much to Do; How Can I Get it All Done?

A: A Four-step Personal Effectiveness Plan

by John H. Shrawder

Do you complain that there are there never enough hours in a day? Do you wonder why you can't seem to finish what you hoped to do complete each day? Are you always rushing to cover the course material at the end of the class hour or term? If you can relate to any of these situations, it might be that you're experiencing the tyranny of the trivial.

if you put out tons of effort accomplishing what ultimately matters the least. I'm betting this discussion of the daily struggle to be more effective resonates with you, and you could use a 4-step plan design to help you get more done in and out of the classroom.

1. Take the long view

How can you get on track and accomplish the things that truly matter and defeat the tyranny of the trivial? The first step is to persistently remind yourself of what is the most important use of your time right now. One way to flush out what is unimportant is to think long-term, perhaps even in life-time frameworks. Taking the long view generally exposes the trivial for what it is.

When you teach, take the long view—teach with the end in mind so that you can picture in your mind's eye what your students will now know, do and feel. With this image you can keep your focus on the most important learning goals and away from trivial, time-wasting management activities or instructional discussions.

Here's a good question to ponder daily, "What do I really want accomplished at the end of my day, week or even my life?" Am I placing my focus and energy in the right places to move forward?

Suggestion—start each day by writing your top-ten goals. Why? Writing goals again and again might seem tedious, but this simple act keeps your goals at a high conscious level, instantly recallable. Then, when you are bombarded during the day with pleas for attention and action you can rapidly assess the value of engaging in an extemporaneous activity in relation to your paramount goals.

2. Written goals put you in back in charge when teaching

Applying goal-consciousness to teaching translates to writing your top instructional goals for the day, week and term before beginning each traditional or online class session. With the important ends fresh in mind, you'll be better prepared do deal with the unexpected.

You'll know if you should stop the flow of the class and address a question or statement—perhaps briefly now and more in-depth later. You'll make better choices and know whether to defer a question or action request until the next class meeting, answer the student's question via e-mail, defer the query for an office-hour meeting, or tweet the student a link to a web or print resource.

3. Plan for the unplanned

Alternatively you might recognize the unplanned event as a golden learning opportunity to be exploited. Furthermore, you could use this interruption in the flow as a special teaching moment about the value of goal setting and time and effort management. Time is the most valuable commodity in a learning situation especially when large numbers of learners are affected by each time allocation decision. The best time-use decision is one that prevents the trivial from watering down your instructional efforts. When you and your students share a commitment to the most important learning goals, they can assist you in keeping learning progress on track.

4. Eliminate the trivial and trite

Losing time is only one consequence of bowing to the trivial. What's even worse is the trivial's insidious drain on emotional energy. With the trivial in the driver's seat, it's disheartening to assess what progress was made toward your instructional and personal goals at the end of the class or work day. Not only can the trivial slow or prevent you from ever reaching your objectives, it can actually move you further away from your destination creating feelings of helplessness and discouragement.

On the other hand, when you and your students confidently make choices, set goals and stubbornly refuse to waver from the path, you feel energetic, purposeful and great! When you accomplish the important and ignore the trivial you teach for success!