

# bulletin

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## Balancing Time A QUESTION OF MANAGEMENT, REFLECTION & ATTITUDE by Kathy Burford

Do you ever feel you have too much to do and too little time to accomplish what you set out to do? It is not an uncommon experience for many to find themselves having to juggle too many internal and external demands both personally and professionally. If you were to stop and take a reading on your 24 hour day to determine the amount of time it takes to accomplish all you have to do, you would probably find that there is not enough time to complete all of your tasks, to sleep, or to relax. Is the culprit really not enough time or better life management?

Teachers are typically very organized individuals. The nature of the work of teaching requires preparation and planning. For example, it is not uncommon for teachers to use their summer months to prepare for new classes they plan to teach in the fall or to be on a constant search for new ideas for classes. Unfortunately, many teachers find themselves having to cope with increased expectations and an increased work load as a result of changes in the educational system. The real issue is not as much about teachers not being good time managers but more about increased demands and unrealistic expectations which can be self-imposed or imposed from external sources. Unrealistic expectations can lead to higher stress and frustration, increased sickness, and a fast track to burnout. It is important to have enough time to plan. It is also important to realistically establish your own limits and be flexible enough to make changes when previous methods are no longer working.



We know people who seem to manage their lives and time effectively. They not only appear to be "good jugglers" but also seem to thrive with the many time challenges they are faced with. What makes the difference given we all have the same amount of time? Mostly it has to do with what we do with our time that really matters. One example of good life management is Dr. Winnifred Rushforth, a Scottish medical doctor by training who, later in her career, became a Jungian psychoanalyst.

Dr. Rushforth had a real zest for living as well as a true respect and love for people. As a young woman in the early 1900's she completed her medical training and was responsible for a busy rural practice. At that time, physicians not only tended the sick and dying but also completed a daily round of house calls. Dr. Rushforth was also a wife and mother and was required to balance the heavy demands of her work with family responsibilities. Following her curiosity and interest in mental disorders, she later studied under Karl Jung and became a psychoanalyst. For over 50 years, Dr. Rushforth had a counselling practice, lectured at the University of Edinburgh, and wrote books and articles. At age 92, she was beginning to slow down but still continued her lifelong routine of rising at 4:00 a.m. and meditating. She continued to see people for counselling and facilitated groups. In the mid 1980's, before her death at age 96, Dr. Rushforth completed her third and final book. The book was a reflection of the lessons learned throughout her own life and what she learned from her work with so many people over the years. She thought most life issues had to do with three of the most important commodities in life: time, energy, and money. She thought that people needed to learn how to manage, set priorities, and often reflect on what they were doing in relation to each.

Commonly, the lack of management in any one of these areas, particularly if extended over a long period, would have a significant negative impact on one's quality of life. So, how do we manage all the unrealistic expectations and demands? A good place to start is always with yourself.

- Know your limits and decide how you will use your energy. The hardest part is learning how to politely and firmly say "No, I am not able to do that right now."
- Plan and organize yourself well ahead of time. Make "to do" lists. Cross off completed tasks.
- Set long and short term goals. Review them periodically to decide whether adjustments need to be made or

if they are still the goals that are most important to you.

- Determine your most important priorities. Decide to move lessor priorities to tomorrow, next week, or month.
- Stop putting off important things that matter to you and determine what your time, energy and money "wasters" are.
- Ask for help, share the load, or learn from someone who knows how to make time for rest and relaxation.
- Work on high priority items when you are fresh and take breaks to break up the monotony of long tasks.
- Give yourself 10-30 minutes a day of high quality quiet time. Plan it in your schedule and do it. Reward yourself once a week with an hour or two to relax and unwind after a high demand time.
- Simplify your life. Clean out those closets and rooms full of things you never have or will never use. Cut out unnecessary activities for yourself and your family.
- Check your attitude. If you perceive time as constricting, it probably will be. If you look back over what you have accomplished you can instead have a sense of satisfaction and validation for the work completed.
- Be grateful for your life. Life will always have its ups and downs. Just when we think we have secured a good life and have everything under control, something happens. It could be a small matter which requires our special attention. It could be something much larger that requires all of our time, energy, and perhaps money. While we have little control over much that happens, there are many things we can do by taking the time to reflect on what is important to us, balancing our energy, ensuring rest breaks, making changes, and sticking by our priorities.

We are all given the same amount of time. Striking a balance between family life and work life commitments can be a constant struggle. A good place to start is with a commitment to determine what we can realistically accomplish. With concerted effort, it will not take long to begin managing life in terms of better use of time, energy, and money.

Kathy Burford is an EAP Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. Kathy will be on leave for the remainder of the 2000-01 school year. Her replacement is Kathy Taylor-Rogers. For confidential assistance contact Kathy Taylor-Rogers (ext. 242) or Marie Wall (ext. 265).