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Maxed Out



The Monday Motivator
National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity



Maxed Out

I've given numerous [time management workshops](#) to completely exhausted groups of tenure-track faculty. When asked why they were so exhausted, I'd hear a lengthy list of time challenges combined with a pervasive feeling that there was no way out of their 60-80 hour workweeks. As I listened, I couldn't help but think of the old TV show "Maxed Out." Each episode featured stressed-out people who were deeply in debt and had no idea how to climb out of it. Inevitably, their financial problems boiled down to: 1) not knowing how much debt they had, 2) a lack of clarity about where their money went each month, and 3) a vague sense of what they hoped might happen in the future, but no concrete plan to move in that direction. They always felt out of control and frustrated at the outset, but as soon as they created a plan, took a hard look at their reality, and made some concrete behavioral changes, they experienced a sense of empowerment and forward motion. So when I was listening to the frazzled faculty, it felt clear to me that they were totally maxed out -- not on money but on **TIME**. And because this is so common, I want to dedicate this week's Monday Motivator to common faculty error #7: **Not Knowing How You Spend Your Time**.

Are You Maxed Out?

We've all heard that financial intelligence requires knowing how you spend your money. The problem with time is that unlike money, it is finite. We each have 24 hours in the day and must divide that

precious time between personal, physical, professional, and familial commitments. We can't borrow extra hours from a credit card or bank. Instead, we have to work with the 24 hours that we have. The faculty members in my workshops complained that they never had enough time, that they were constantly running from one commitment to the next, and that their lack of time led to feelings of frustration, guilt, shame, and an overall sense of not moving forward at an adequate pace. But at the same time, they couldn't answer the most basic questions about how they spent their time because they just don't know where the hours go.

I have been tracking my money for the past 12 years. At first, I believed it was a total waste of time because I thought that I already knew how I was spending it. But the first month I tracked every penny, I couldn't believe the discrepancy between what I thought I spent and what I actually spent. Knowing where my money went enabled me to start gaining control over my finances and making conscious decisions that would allow me to meet my long-term goals.

Likewise, the first time I tracked my time over a week, I was shocked by how much time I was spending on service and teaching and how little I was spending on writing and research, despite knowing that my publication record was the primary criteria for promotion and tenure at my institution. Understanding how you spend your time each week (not in your imagination, but in reality) will help you to decide if you are investing in things that will pay off in the long run or spending it on things that offer immediate gratification but no long term interest. And more importantly, you must know how you're investing your time today in order to make conscious decisions about how you will spend it in the future.

Track Your Time

I want to suggest that you try the same homework that the adviser on "Maxed Out" assigned: tracking! Instead of you tracking your money, **keep track of how you spend your time this week**. If you are feeling exhausted, frustrated, and I-don't-even-know-how-I'm-gonna-make-it-to-Spring-Break tired, then try starting this week by simply tracking your time. It doesn't have to be difficult or unpleasant, and it doesn't require you to buy or do anything different. Just put a little scrap of paper on your desk and keep a running tab of your activities and the time you spend on them during each day this week. Include everything: e-mail, writing, course prep, grading, talking to colleagues, reading, meetings, phone calls, student meetings, attending talks, preparing to give a talk, worrying, crying, food breaks, Facebook, etc.

Evaluate Your Data

Once you have a week's worth of data, tally up how much time you spend on research, teaching, and service when you sit down for your weekly planning meeting (a.k.a the **Sunday Meeting**). That's a

great time to gently and patiently ask yourself:

- Is how I'm spending my time aligned with how I will be evaluated for tenure and promotion?
- Does my time reflect my personal values, priorities, and long-term goals?

If the answer to these questions is "yes," then congratulations! But if you find that the answer is a resounding "NO!" then it's time to make some changes. For example, if 50 percent of your evaluation criteria is based on research and publication, but you are only spending 2 hours a week writing -- there's a problem. If teaching is 25 percent of your evaluation criteria, but you are spending 40 hours a week on it -- there's a problem. And if service is taking up more than a few hours per week -- there's definitely a problem. The good news is that these are problems that can be resolved by proactively adjusting your behavior.

Rethink Your Time Expenditures

Faculty development researchers have documented that the difference between successful new faculty and those who struggle is **how they spend their time**. Successful new faculty:

- Spend at least 30 minutes a day on scholarly writing
- Integrate their research into their teaching
- Manage course preparation time and avoid over-preparing for classes
- Spend time each week discussing research and teaching with colleagues

Only you can determine if you're satisfied with how you are spending your time each day, but if you're unhappy, exhausted, and feel like you're not moving forward, then it might be time for a check-in. Becoming conscious of how you spend your time AND comparing it to the behaviors of successful new faculty should give you some concrete ideas about how to climb out of your time debt.

The Weekly Challenge

If you're feeling maxed out this week, I challenge you to:

- Track your time!
- Honestly evaluate, without criticism or judgment, how your time expenditures compare with your tenure and promotion criteria and/or your personal goals and values.
- Try to identify and eliminate unnecessary time demands to increase the time you have available for the things that really matter.
- Write at least 30 minutes every day.

I hope that this week brings each of you the patience to track your time, the wisdom to evaluate your current situation, and the sense of empowerment that results from making conscious decisions about


how you spend your time each day.

Peace and Productivity,



Kerry Ann Rockquemore, PhD

President, National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity

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