Time Management Tip: How to Avoid Overloading Your Schedule

**How not to take on too much**

Taking on too much work can have several negative consequences, both in your professional and home life:

- it can cause a high degree of stress and eventually lead you to "burn out"
- it can lead to neglect in your personal life, with overtime eating into time you'd spend with family and friends, relaxing, or exercising, and
- it can result in a failure to meet your core work responsibilities because you're too busy with other tasks

In addition to these negative consequences, taking on too much work often leads to multitasking. The problem with multitasking is that trying to do more than one thing at the same time often leads to mistakes. It's also generally inefficient and stressful. You just can't work as effectively if your concentration is scattered among several different jobs.

There are two main strategies for overcoming a tendency to take on too much work:

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<td><strong>1) Know your key responsibilities</strong></td>
<td>It's important to know what your key work responsibilities and goals are, so you can prioritize meeting these over taking on other assignments. You should remind yourself that it isn't always possible to do everything. When you're feeling torn among different tasks, weigh up their relative importance in terms of your key goals. It can help to ask yourself the question, &quot;What's the best or most important thing I could be doing now?&quot;</td>
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<td><strong>2) Plan your time</strong></td>
<td>You should plan your time carefully to ensure you spend it as productively as possible and that you don't take on more than you can manage. This involves dividing your day into blocks of time and assigning an activity to each block. Activities you schedule might range from working on different tasks to managing your e-mail and making calls, to handling personal chores, and to getting enough rest. You may also assign some flexible time, for unexpected tasks or those that take longer than planned to complete. Once you've allocated all your available time and your schedule is full, you'll know you shouldn't make any more commitments.</td>
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How to say "no"

Once you know your key goals and responsibilities, as well as how full your schedule is, you'll know how to respond when someone asks you to take on more work. Saying "no" can be difficult, especially if it's your manager who asks you to take on a new responsibility. Even if it's a colleague who asks for your help when you're too busy to give it, it can be difficult to let go of the desire to please everyone. However, remember that it can be much worse to take on a commitment you won't be able to meet than to say "no" in the first place.

When you do say "no" to a request to take on more work, it's important to avoid causing offense or bad feeling. If it's your boss you need to say "no" to, it's also important to prevent your response from sounding like insubordination. This won't be good for your relationship – or your career.

To say "no" without having negative consequences, you can follow certain strategies:

- **Buy time** – Particularly if it's your manager who asks you to take on more work, it's a good idea to say that you'd like some time to consider the request. Give your manager a deadline for when you will get back to him or her. This will give you time to determine whether your schedule really is too full and, if it is, to prepare a suitable response. It also shows that you're taking the request seriously. Simply returning an abrupt "no" would be disrespectful of your manager's authority. When you buy time, it can also help to say that you appreciate having been asked to take on a particular responsibility. And remember, buying time doesn't mean changing the subject.

- **Say "no" in the right way** – With either a manager or a colleague, it's always important to say "no" in a way that doesn't cause offense or appear unhelpful. Often the best approach is to make it clear how accepting more work will compromise your ability to meet your core responsibilities.

- **Avoid a discussion** – When you say "no," it's natural to want to justify your answer at some length. The problem with this approach is that too often, you may end up arguing yourself into a corner.

## Complimentary Resources

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Organizational and Talent Development

- Leadership Development
- Team Development
- Organizational Development
- Employee Development
- Learning Technology / Spark Learning

http://www.sanjac.edu/org-talent-development

✔ Register for *Leadership Discussion Groups* via SPARK Learning – Item # ODHR 5431

✔ Need information on how to navigate SPARK? Search *SPRK 1000* in the catalog to access the on-line training course: Spark LMS: Getting Started and General Navigation

SPARK support available @ (281) 998-6399 (ext. 6399) or sparksupport@sjcd.edu

For additional Organizational and Talent Development support, email the OTD department at otd@sjcd.edu