



Time Management and Action Planning

The importance of time management and strategies to incorporate effective action planning into everyday life

- What is time management
- Where time management can commonly be improved
- Covey's time quadrants
- Incorporating time management into everyday life
- Action planner template

4.4 Time Management

Taking time to manage your time

Why this is important

The saying "so much to do and so little time to do it" shows the importance of time management. We can never slow down or speed up time so we must be able to manage ourselves in relation to time. This will help us achieve all that we need to do in the time that we have.

Most people have the goal of having a better lifestyle; often this means they want to spend less time working. Good management of time allows you to control your own working time, therefore freeing up more time to be spent not working; it allows you to create time to do what you want!

This fact sheet will cover:

- What is time management?
- The most common areas where time management can be improved upon on-farm
- The theory of time management
- How to incorporate time management into everyday life
- Action Planner template

What is time management?

Time management is a skill that people learn and then use in their work and their personal life. Most people have to continually work on this; it is not something that just happens! To manage time effectively people need to learn how to plan.

Planning for time management

Time management is about thinking ahead, planning what needs to be done, who is going to do it and when it needs to be done. By planning what needs to be done you can then prioritise the tasks that are more important so they get done first. People who can plan well, and manage their time as a result, have a better control over their business.

Most common areas where time management can be improved

There are many areas on the farm that would benefit from an improvement in time management but these are some of the areas where most people could make significant time gains.

- Administration
- Rosters (see Rostering Systems Fact Sheet 4.6)
- Winter feeding plan
- Grazing decisions
- Organising contractors

- Reading and up-skilling
- Pasture management
- Weed control.

The theory of time management

It is often said that the difference between a good farmer and a bad farmer is two weeks. Basically good farmers plan their time; they are proactive. The bad farmer tends to be reactive. By planning and prioritising, jobs can be delegated resourcefully and optimum results achieved.

Covey's Time Quadrants

The time quadrant theory contains two main elements – Urgent & Important.

People generally spend time in all of these quadrants at some point but the aim is to spend the majority of time in Quadrant 2 – “Important and Not Urgent”.

<p>1. Important and Urgent</p> <p>“The Procrastinator” - There are many things that fall into Quadrant 1 that we can't control, but many we can. Jobs get put off until they become a crisis – this is often as a result of poor planning.</p>	<p>2. Important but Not Urgent</p> <p>“The Prioritiser” - The Quadrant of Excellence – where we want to be. To be in this quadrant planning is essential. Living in this quadrant gives you balance, control and high performance.</p>
<p>3. Not Important but Urgent</p> <p>“The Yes-man” - Trying to please everyone and agreeing to do everything. Urgent things become deceptive and you think they are important. Everyone else is happy but you.</p>	<p>4. Not Important and Not Urgent</p> <p>“The Slacker” - Anything but what needs to be done gets done. Time is wasted on things of little or no value.</p>

New work or life commitments can be classified using these quadrants. Some of the typical jobs that occur on a sheep and beef farm have been fitted into the table below:

<p>1. Important and Urgent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lambing or calving ewes and cows having difficulties • Identifying reasons for low growth rates in young stock and putting plans in place to meet target weights. 	<p>2. Important but Not Urgent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GST and accounts • Paying bills • Monitoring pasture.
<p>3. Not Important but Urgent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading your mail every day • Going into town to get supplies 3 times a week. 	<p>4. Not Important and Not Urgent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Painting the woolshed • Tidying the implement shed.

The aim of using these quadrants is to prioritise the activities that will drive your business and your life in the desired direction.

How to incorporate time management into every day life

- Plan your time. Sit down annually and set out a seasonal plan. Include major dates such as the start of lambing and calving, when mating will start, holidays and when crops should ideally be planted and harvested. Using this seasonal plan throughout the year, weekly and monthly work requirements for the months and weeks ahead. For example, if shearing is only four weeks away woolsheds will need to be made ready now and all the normal consumables such as woolpacks and emery papers brought in. This is proactive, rather than reactive.
- Use a wall planner for clarity and overview.
- Get the team involved in the process.
- Rank 'Things to Do' in order of importance from 1 to 4 in line with Covey's quadrants, and then prioritise them within each quadrant. Those with a high importance get a 1; those with a low importance get 4. Most of the manager's jobs should be ranked as a 1 or 2, and they should be the jobs that are done first (see the Action Planner Template 4.4.1).
- Use technology to your advantage. Using email or faxing can reduce time spent getting messages to people. The accountant, banker or rural supplies store can be contacted in this way. Use answer phones, leave clear messages and ask people to reply by leaving a message with their answer or confirmation. Using fax, email and answer phones instead of waiting for person-to-person contact means the request can be made at the caller's convenience and the service supplier can leave a reply message when the requirement is ready.
- Have a cellphone. This can help efficiency especially when calling the vet or contacting staff. However, cellphones can waste time too, people can make contact more easily, but when they ring it may not be convenient for you. Using walkie talkies, or turning the phone off when necessary, may be good options.
- If a job is taking up too much time and preventing other projects being done then think about getting someone else to do it. For example, if weed spraying seems to take weeks, get a spray contractor in to finish it quickly. It is often more important that a job gets done, than who does it.
- Roster time off. If time off is booked into your planner you are more likely to take it.
- Have a "lost" list and a "to buy" list. When someone on the farm can't find something put it on the lost list; someone else may know where the item is but not realise others think it is lost. Only go to town once a week to buy farm supplies. Get people to plan ahead and write down what they need on the "to buy" list. This will save unnecessary trips into town.
- Learn to say no. Be more assertive and manage valuable time by saying no to things that don't fit in and will cause you to work in the wrong quadrant.

What are the benefits to me?

- Good time management puts the farmer in control of the business
- Peace-of-mind is attained as work gets done and leisure time is made available
- Prioritising the tasks gives more time for planning and monitoring of the business, allowing the farmer to do more high value work and less of the \$10/hour jobs
- It is a great skill for all on the farm to have. Important jobs get done and working becomes more pleasurable.

What do I do next?

- Look at how time is currently spent; perhaps keeping a diary for a few weeks to analyse where time is being spent.
- Talk to staff and ask them for suggestions on how to improve time management on-farm. Involve them in trying to improve their time management; they will have more ownership of new procedures if they are involved in developing them.
- Get a big wall planner to record everyone's time off. A second planner in the office to record major events and appointments may also be useful. This will help everyone to clearly see any time requirements in advance of the event.
- Record how time is spent then analyse it for possible streamlining.

Useful references

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen R. Covey

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens, Sean Covey

The Idiot's guide to time management, Jeff Davidson

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