



New role, new demands

A school leader's guide



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This guide for school leaders has been produced in collaboration with Bruce Wilson of the Education Business and Nous Group, an Australian management consulting firm that works with public, private and not for profit education agencies and institutions to improve educational outcomes. It includes a framework for interpersonal behaviours related to leadership, as well as supporting research, tools and references.

This icon indicates a link to a resource.



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Introduction

The Leadership Scenarios

Principals have a key role to play in making a difference to the lives of young people and to society. However, they work in a challenging and changing environment; they are unlikely to succeed unless they are well prepared and understand their role.

The Leadership Scenarios are a series of videos, each with a framework, guide and list of resources for developing practice. They have been designed to assist new principals to understand and deal with the challenges they may face in their new role and appreciate how their work relates to the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (the Standard) and the *Leadership Profiles*.

The Standard is a public statement that sets out what principals are expected to know, understand and do to succeed in their work. It is represented as an interdependent and integrated model that recognises three leadership requirements that a principal draws upon within five areas of professional practice.

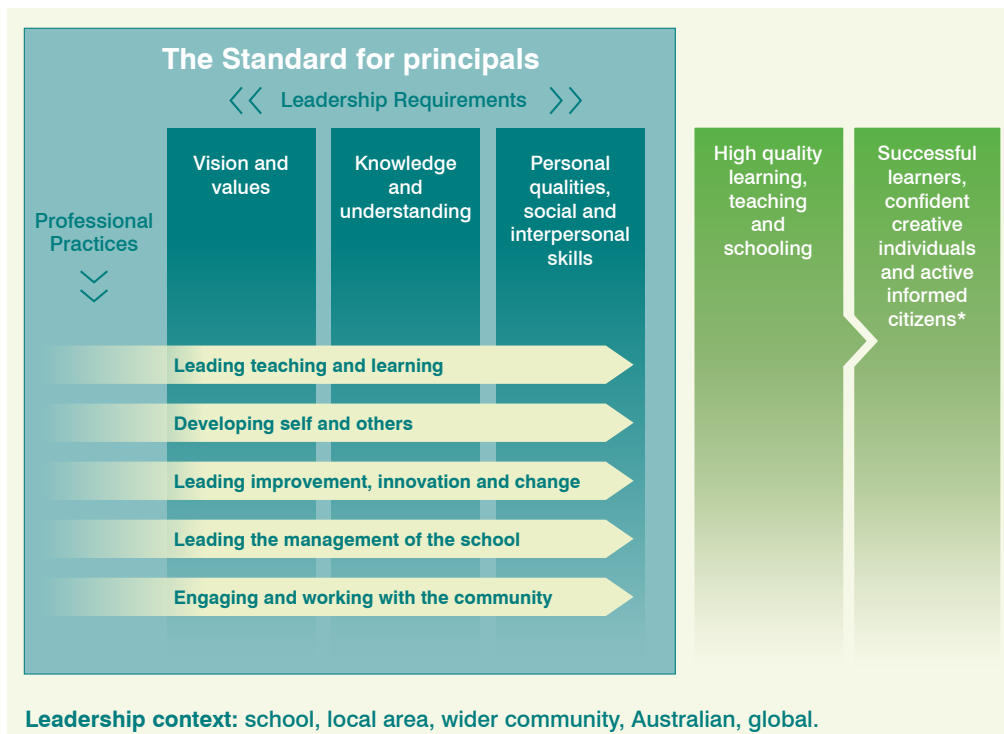


Figure 1: The Australian Professional Standard for Principals

Source: *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*, AITSL (2014)



New role, new demands

New role, new demands, one video in the series, focuses on elements in the Professional Practice of Leading the management of the school, in particular:

- understanding effective time management
- using strategies and techniques to enhance time management
- appropriately delegating tasks and ensuring accountabilities are met.

Managing time

Schools are busy, complex environments and the principal role reflects this. Within each of the five Professional Practices of the *Standard* (see page 1), there is a multitude of different activities. As new leaders settle into their role they face a variety of challenges: an increasingly diverse set of tasks, the unpredictability of the day, role ambiguity and conflict.

Navigating these challenges requires good time management habits, but the unpredictability of schools means that these have to be tempered by flexibility. Time management refers to a systematic approach for dealing with daily tasks and issues to effectively accomplish one's goals.

Decisions on how to allocate time between priorities are important for effective leadership and enhancing school outcomes.

The time management skills discussed in this paper include setting achievable goals, identifying priorities for action, auditing time, developing an effective time management regime and monitoring progress. These skills can increase effectiveness and boost job performance, and new school leaders can learn them through deliberate effort, practice and continual development. Time management skills are also important at a whole school level, as they impact student achievement, staff and parent assessment of the school and staff satisfaction.

The *New role, new demands* framework overleaf outlines an approach to effective time management:

- The **grey outer ring** illustrates the diversity of stakeholders and the broad context in which a school leader must operate.
- The **light green middle ring** indicates that managing energy and maintaining wellbeing can act as a buffer by increasing capacity and resilience.
- The **dark green inner circle** outlines the four steps a leader can take to support effective time management.

'Our ability to plan, enlist the help of others, and achieve a vision is directly related to our ability to efficiently organize our environments and effectively use time.'

Source: Buck (2013, p. 2)



Leadership scenarios

New role, new demands

A framework for effective time management

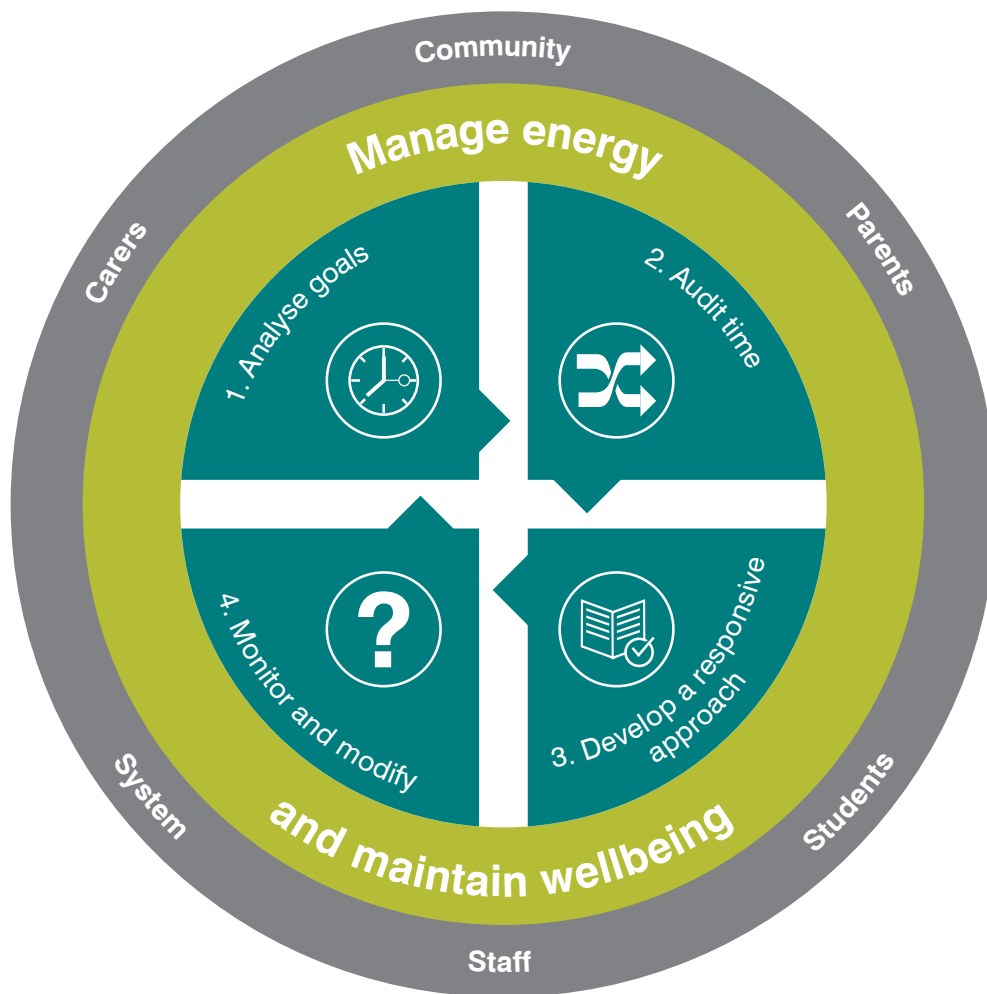


Figure 2: New role, new demands framework



Time management and wellbeing

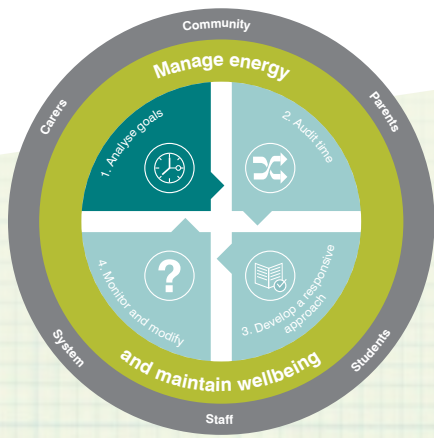
Studies have found school principals have higher anxiety and/or depression and lower overall mental health compared to the general Australian population. Significant workloads and the need to constantly manage a wide range of issues can lead to feeling stressed, isolated, frustrated and eventually burnt out.

Effective time management practices are one mechanism that can contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction and energy. The more control we feel we have in a situation, the less stress we experience. Managing time and becoming more confident about your capacity to complete priority tasks is a critical element in taking control and managing stress. Even a modest investment in time management can make a real difference to job outcomes and stress levels.

Taking care of one's physical wellbeing and emotional health has significant personal and organisational benefits. These include:

- improved physical and mental wellbeing and resilience
- increased energy and vitality
- increased concentration and productivity
- improved mood
- improved enjoyment and engagement at work
- reduced burnout.

Research also indicates healthy leaders are perceived to be more capable and engaged, rating higher on various leadership indices.



Step 1

Analyse goals

Setting goals and working systematically towards them is key to maintaining effective daily time management routines.

Goal setting

A school leader has to determine specific goals to focus on. The big goals will improve student outcomes, improve teaching quality and build capability within the school. Setting these goals requires understanding the bigger picture of what is needed in the school.

Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) suggests one of these habits is 'beginning with the end in mind'. Covey recommends people take the time to stop, reflect and think about what really matters and why. He emphasises that this process also depends on clarifying core values and beliefs.

Having clear goals can provide new leaders with direction for how best to focus their time. Yet schools are unpredictable and both urgent and important tasks constantly compete for attention. Urgent tasks need to be completed to manage the school, but the principal's time should be preferentially directed to activity that progresses the big picture goals.

'The principal of the future has to be much more attuned to the big picture, and much more sophisticated at conceptual thinking, and transforming the organization through people and teams.'

Source: Fullan (2002, p. 3)

Identifying 'goal achieving' activities

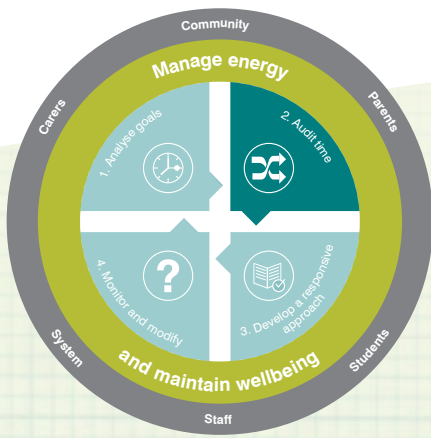
After setting goals, it is important that professional judgement determines the issues that require attention and a quick response. This involves thinking about how daily activities will contribute towards achieving the big picture goals.

The important activities are those that contribute directly to these goals. If a school leader understands which activities are most important, it is easier to say 'no' to activities that are less directly linked to achieving the big picture goals. If your current goal is, for example, to bring the school budget into balance, you might focus on activities like reviewing spending and revenue, identifying areas of possible savings, seeking potential grant funding and so on.

'Put simply, the most important things are to know what to focus on and how you are going to get it done. I call this always knowing your MIT: the most important task.'

Source: Kruse (2016)

Identifying your goals, and being clear about the activities needed to achieve them, is a means of being systematic and strategic in the use of time. It is also a way of deciding what not to do, either by delegating to others or by saying 'no'.



Step 2

Audit time

Establishing clear goals and planning to focus activity on those goals is not enough. There is often a discrepancy between the way a school leader actually spends their time and the way they *think* they spend their time. Some school leaders spend a significant amount of their time focusing on things that are time pressing, rather than important. Auditing time provides clarity around where and how time is really being spent and highlights where time management practices could change.

Checking how you spend your time

One way to understand time allocation is to use an activity log. This involves recording how much time is spent on each activity category. An activity log should be completed every day for five to ten consecutive days. This will provide sufficient data to determine patterns and trends. It is important the recorded data are honest and accurate to provide useful insight. Once the activity log is complete, it is possible to identify how much time was spent on each activity category. It can also show the part of the day when you are most productive, and patterns in the school day that suggest optimal timing for key activities.

'The last time I kept a log, I was surprised to learn that when I am in the office, I spend almost half my time on the telephone...'

Source: Biech (2008, p. 202)

Activity log templates



Finding the gaps

School leaders should then compare the results of the activity log to their goals. This helps to understand the time they spend on activities versus how these activities contribute to their personal and professional goals. If low value activities take up a significant proportion of time, this would be an area for change. The following are useful questions to ask:

- Am I spending time on activities that will accomplish my goals?
- Are low value activities taking up a lot of time?
- Which goals are not being completed?
- Where do I need to spend more time?



Prioritising effort

The nature of the role means that school leaders may find it difficult to accomplish all outstanding tasks each day. The most important tasks must be prioritised to ensure that a focus on urgent tasks does not prevent the completion of these more important activities. At the most basic level, it is important to recognise what is important and what is urgent:

- An important task is related to key goals.
- An urgent task is one that cannot easily be delayed.

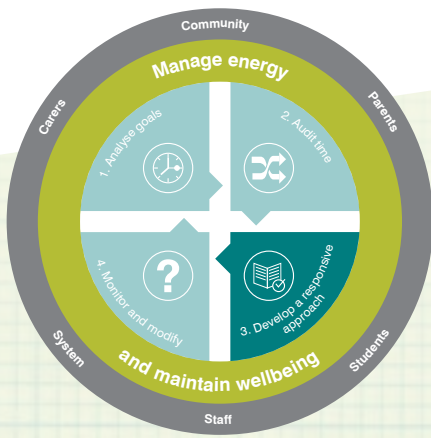
By evaluating each task to determine its importance and urgency, it is possible to prioritise and schedule time accordingly:

- a. Important and urgent tasks, such as dealing with a critical incident related to student wellbeing, should be prioritised and done quickly.
- b. Important tasks that are not urgent, such as developing a policy related to pedagogy or the curriculum, should be scheduled but do not need to be done quickly.
- c. Urgent tasks, such as completing paperwork related to an initiative that does not relate to key goals, should be carefully evaluated and delegated or rejected if possible.
- d. Tasks that are neither urgent nor important, such as reading irrelevant material, should be recognised and avoided.

Stephen Covey's time management matrix can help to prioritise effort (Covey, 1989). However, it is still important to take account of the views of staff and other stakeholders in making these judgements. There will be times when an activity is more important to some stakeholders than it seems to you.

'How can a dedicated principal work really, really hard but fail to get significant gains in student achievement? The answer is obvious: by spending too much time on the wrong things and not enough on the right things.'

Source: Marshall (2008, p. 17)



Step 3

Develop a responsive approach

Identifying goals and priorities helps you see what matters most, but does not encompass everything a leader has to do. A responsive approach to time management requires balancing important scheduled tasks with urgent, unexpected issues.

School leaders can address this issue by making changes to the way they work, such as choosing to adopt a to do list and using a flexible schedule. They can also make school wide changes to improve efficiency and promote best practice. This helps to support an effective school culture and information flow, helping the school to run more efficiently and freeing up time.

This section outlines responsive time management approaches for both individuals and the whole school. These approaches help to bring order and structure to demand management. However, some of them may be easier to adopt than others depending on school context and personality. It is important to use personal judgement to guide action.

Making time management a habit

Establishing good time management habits will require conscious attention at first, particularly given the frequent interruptions and urgent requests that are typical in schools. Changing well established habits can take a long time.

The process starts with recognising poor time management routines: perhaps you constantly check your emails. You can examine why you do this and what the cues are that stimulate it: do you automatically check emails when you return to your desk? Then you need a way of changing the habit: you could decide that in future you will check emails three times a day. You might find that you slip back sometimes, but recognising the pattern and taking action are steps to establishing better habits.

'Once you understand that habits can change, you have the freedom and the responsibility to remake them.'

Source: Duhigg (2012, p. 271)

Adopting an appropriate time management system

Time management strategies that align to an individual's personality and preferences are more likely to be adopted long term. Individuals differ in their preferences, so it may be helpful to experiment with time management systems and processes and identify what works best. Some common time management approaches are described below.

Creating to do lists

A to do list is useful because it consolidates outstanding tasks in a single document. It reminds you of important activities and makes it easier to schedule and prioritise. David Allen (2003) asserts that capturing all outstanding short term and long term tasks in a single place reduces the mental effort required to remember the tasks. Tasks on the list can be grouped based on similar activities and arranged in the order in which they should be done.

'Highly successful people *feel* the passage of time. They know the potential that every minute holds and know the cost of 'giving away' even a single minute.'

Source: Kruse (2015)



Developing an adaptable schedule

After identifying and prioritising tasks on the to do list, create an adaptable schedule. This can be done weekly, and modified daily when necessary. A schedule helps to protect time from unwanted interruptions. Being realistic with time expectations is critical to prevent over committing time, which increases stress and reduces effectiveness.

Useful tips for effective scheduling (adapted from Grissom, Loeb & Mitani, 2015) include:

- starting by scheduling the most important and urgent tasks on the to do list
- scheduling time to complete essential administration tasks (e.g. emails and meetings)
- planning tasks around the 'rhythm of the day' (e.g. the need to be visible at the beginning and end of day)
- arranging tasks around annual school events that require significant time and attention across the year
- including contingency time to allow space for inevitable unplanned, urgent and important demands
- allocating the remaining time to tasks that support key goals
- staying flexible by re-evaluating schedules and tasks.

Activity scheduling templates



Focusing on one activity at a time

Psychological studies have found that multi-tasking actually decreases productivity. This is because most people cannot attend to multiple tasks simultaneously. Instead, a person actually switches quickly from one task to another, resulting in a loss of productivity and broken concentration. Scheduling workload to allow focus on one task at a time will maximise attention, concentration and impact.

Adding items into a calendar

A commonly used time management approach is to transfer the list of prioritised tasks directly into one's calendar, integrating tasks with planned day to day activities. This ensures that time is set aside to complete the identified activity, prevents other meetings from being booked in that time and also sets a limit for the amount of time that can be spent on the task.

Sharing your schedule and diary

School leaders can share their diary with the leadership team, business manager and administrative support. If others know that an important deadline is approaching that requires a significant amount of time, such as the submission of budget papers to the Board, they can provide support by not booking other events or meetings in the diary unless urgent. This helps to introduce gatekeepers, who can safeguard time to ensure the leader can focus on the upcoming deadline.

Using technology as a time management enabler

Effective use of technology can assist time management. At an individual level, technology can be used to help set up efficient and effective day to day operations. For example, a digital calendar can be used to consolidate appointments in a single place, set automatic reminders, colour code tasks according to priority and schedule time for specific activities. Online calendars assist responsible and collective scheduling of tasks as well as providing insight for staff about the pressures and availability of senior leaders. Technology can be used to keep parents and other stakeholders informed of events and activities (e.g. through a school website, blog or group email).



It is helpful to have a whole school policy about the use of technology including:

- reasonable response times (e.g. for emails)
- restrictions on when emails will and will not be sent (e.g. weekdays only)
- protocols of use (e.g. always check prior to adding an appointment to someone's diary).

This helps to manage expectations of colleagues and parents and reduces pressure on staff to respond within unrealistic timeframes.

Popular scheduling apps



Establishing policies and practices

Policies and practices can be created to support effective time management practices for the whole school. Staff, parents and students can be empowered to take action themselves if policies articulate how they should behave in different circumstances.

Understanding what policies already exist

Most schools will already have policies, standards or ways of working. A new leader can check what exists, what needs refreshing and what needs recommunicating. Many avoidable problems or queries arise because people are unsure of what they should do.

Communicating preferred ways of working

Expectations about preferred ways of working can be communicated to staff. They could include:

- establishing specific open door times when staff members can drop in for short conversations without an appointment
- encouraging staff, parents and students to make a formal appointment for longer, more detailed conversations
- making a habit of being visible at set times in the school day
- empowering teachers and other school leaders to be visible as well (this makes them more approachable for parents and students and they may be able to resolve most issues without needing to refer to the principal)
- running a regular parent forum to help identify any concerns early on.

Sharing the load: delegating and distributing leadership

A school leader does not have to do everything. Time management for a busy leader is enhanced when others in the school take on responsibility for tasks and activities. Delegating to others is efficient, builds capacity and increases engagement. Delegation of tasks can vary according to staff skills, experience, capacity and development needs. Where capacity is strong, then leadership can be distributed more widely. Where it is less well developed, it is still possible to delegate but a higher degree of supervision and coaching will be required.

'A manager should ask, "Could someone else do the job sufficiently well?" If so, then someone else should do it.'

Source: Aquila (1988, p. 38)



Delegation

Delegation involves assigning and entrusting responsibility to others. Although the benefits are clear, research suggests that school leaders do not always delegate as effectively as they could. Delegation enables energy to be focused on the most important tasks. It provides development opportunities for staff members by enabling them to participate in school decision making and problem solving. Delegation guidelines include:

- a. building a leadership team whose skills complement and supplement those of the principal
- b. delegating tasks where:
 - others have the expertise to complete the task
 - tasks can be better and more quickly completed by others
 - the task provides a development opportunity for others.
- c. giving clear instructions and boundaries by checking that requirements are clearly understood, identifying the outcome(s) and time frames and clarifying check in points
- d. matching accountability with authority by providing the person delegated the task with the requisite authority and resources
- e. holding the person delegated a task accountable for delivering the outcome on time and to the expected standards
- f. monitoring, encouraging and supporting by providing feedback to acknowledge successes and areas for improvement along the way (if this is a person's first time completing a task, offer additional support and encouragement)
- g. focusing on the results not the process (micro-management is not helpful when delegating and people need space to achieve the desired result in a way that works for them)
- h. keeping track of delegated tasks and providing early feedback about progress
- i. watching out for upward delegation as, although advice and support should be provided, it is better to build capacity through support and it is not helpful to personally take on a problem unless critical.

Many schools in Australia are small, which can create significant challenges in delegating: there may be minimal support available, and some principals will have full teaching responsibilities. In this situation, school leaders may call on community resources and make links with neighbouring schools and regional services. Schools in rural and remote communities can share materials and resources and even explore the possibility of joint appointments (e.g. an assistant principal or business manager role).

Distributed leadership

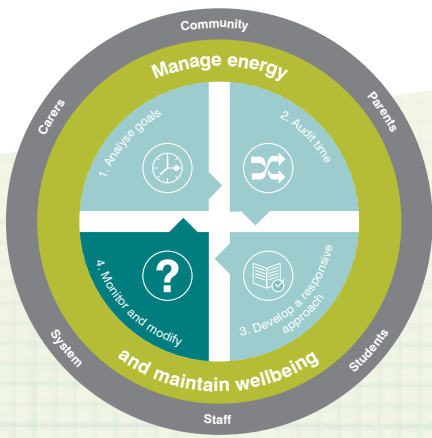
When leadership is distributed, responsibility is allocated across the school. This emphasises delegation, collective responsibility and shared authority. It creates a positive cycle of capacity building and helps to clarify accountabilities, develop leadership capabilities and create a climate of trust. Distributed leadership occurs when several teachers are selected to lead decision making on a particular area in which they have expertise, or where all teachers are given responsibility to support the achievement of a particular outcome for students. Distributed leadership shifts the role of principal from a focus on decision making to a focus on building the capability of others.

Distributed leadership has received increased attention and support in recent educational literature and research and has been linked to higher student achievement outcomes. However, before choosing to encourage distributed leadership, it is important to gain an accurate understanding of staff capability and capacity. If capability is low, it may be wise to delay or stage implementation: skills training and capability development may be needed before leadership responsibility can be distributed.



Setting boundaries around personal time

There are many tasks, stakeholders and requirements pulling on a principal's time. Unless boundaries are established and enforced around personal time, it is easy for work hours to extend. Principals may then find themselves without a reasonable amount of personal time. To combat this it is important to be clear and specific about boundaries and hold oneself and others to account for respecting these boundaries. The introduction of policies and procedures related to down time for all staff can assist with this process.



Step 4

Monitor and modify

Time management requires continuous discipline to ensure the right amount of time is allocated to the right activities. Monitoring progress provides a feedback loop that shows you:

- how effective your time management practices are
- the extent of time you invest in value adding activities
- obstacles or distractions that interfere with success.

Remaining adaptive

It is easy to become absorbed in day to day operations and lose sight of school and system priorities. An adaptive leader is willing to make changes to their time management practice where required. They try different approaches to ensure their efforts are aligned to their personal, professional and school goals.

'Managing your time is much more than making a to do list and learning to say no. It's a skill ... that requires self assessment, planning, and continuous discipline and improvement.'

Source: Managing time: Expert Solutions to Everyday Challenges (2006, p. 5)

Managing priorities



Engaging in professional development

Professional learning is an important part of preparing for a new role, and it applies to time management as much as to other areas. It should include structured and unstructured learning activities to increase:

- capability (e.g. increasing proficiency to use technology to support time management activities)
- capacity (e.g. making time management a habit which frees up time for other goal related activities).

'New learning must become a habit, a routine of living.'

Source: Sorenson & Goldsmith (2016, p166)

Selecting a mentor and meeting regularly

Leaders also need support in improving their time management effectiveness. Practice-focused mentoring is a strong professional relationship that attends to the professional development of school leaders through:

- ongoing conversations
- evidence about and self evaluation of practice
- goal setting aligned to the *Standard*
- technical and emotional support.

'Characteristics of an effective mentor include professional principal experience, ability to provide effective feedback, good listening skills and a non judgemental attitude.'

Source: Barnett (2001)



Practice-focused mentoring is an integral part of a school leader's professional development and an important support mechanism for leaders learning to adapt to the new range of challenges and demands on their time. Although identifying the right mentor to share experiences and test ideas with may take some effort, the potential benefits are significant and worth the investment.

Beyond mentoring, school leaders should also build strong relationships and support networks. This means having a confidante or group of people to discuss issues with at school as well as support networks outside of school. Supportive and positive relationships are associated with positive psychological wellbeing and reduced risk of burnout.

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