



How to Thrive with Adult ADD / ADHD

by

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Class 6: Planning and Prioritizing

HOW to MANAGE TIME

There are two main aspects to good time management:

1. **Planning** – Determining how to complete a project or task, by budgeting your time and creating target dates for various steps, and scheduling the necessary activities;
2. **Prioritizing** – Determining how to spend a particular period of time when you have multiple tasks or competing priorities

A BLUEPRINT for PLANNING

To create a workable plan for any project, whether personal or work-related, you'll need a calendar, a target date, an understanding of what steps are required to complete the project, the order the steps must be completed in, and approximately how long each step will take.

Identify Action Steps – Break your project down into small steps. You could start by identifying components of the project. Then break down the components further into the steps of action required to complete it. Ideally, each step could be completed in one session. You might have several major milestones, with each one divided into mini-steps of action.

- **Hint:** Use the "Mind-Map" technique to painlessly plot out the various steps involved.

Order of the Steps – Write or type the steps in order they must be performed. If you're not sure what must be done before what, jump in anywhere and imagine yourself doing that step. If you are unable to complete the step in your mind because something else comes first, then that tells you what the prior step must be.

Some steps may not matter what order they are performed in. In that case, consider if another person's involvement is required. Knowing that you have less control over another person's actions than your own, you may want to leave longer time for steps needing someone else's cooperation.

Time Estimates - Next to each step, enter an estimate of how long you'll need to perform the required actions. (The more you've developed your time sense from the previous chapter, the easier this will be!) For actions where you have no idea how long it might take, look back on anything similar you've done for guidance, or ask someone who has done something similar.

Cautions for time estimation:

- ***Don't assume that completing a task will take you the same length of time it took someone else.*** Consider their experience level compared to yours, your distraction tendencies, learning curve, and amount of likely interruptions.
- ***Be conservative!*** As a rule of thumb, it is much safer to over-estimate the time required than to be overly optimistic.

Calendar – It doesn't matter if you use a paper calendar, a PDA, or a computer program. What counts is being able to see your schedule, preferably a week at a time. In order to plot out when you can work on your project, you'll want to be confident that your calendar reflects all your commitments. For that reason, it makes sense to have one calendar for work and personal life.

- ◆ ***Julia didn't take her personal commitments into account as she planned out an important project for work. She figured that if any step took longer than anticipated, she could simply stay late at work to finish by the deadline. She ran into trouble when she forgot about the Broadway musical that she had tickets to attend the night before the project's due date. Since the expensive tickets had been purchased months earlier for her parents' anniversary, she was not able to change her plans. As a result, she was late finishing the project.***

Target Date and Milestones - Planning is easier if you have a deadline or target date to work backwards from. ADDers usually have the most difficulty with unstructured time when there is not a deadline, and no one is waiting for the result. So if there's a project you'd like to complete, give yourself a date to shoot for and mark it on your calendar.

Once you have the final target date, work backwards from the end date, starting with the last step, to plot out when you need to complete each step. When you've worked backwards with all the steps, you'll get to the date you need to begin the project.

Case Study in Planning: Arnold's Garage

- ◆ *Arnold's garage was so cluttered with junk that there was no room to park the car. On May 1, Arnold promised his wife he'd get the garage cleaned out by May 15. In the past, he would have typically waited until the day before to even think about it. But now, Arnold was determined actually succeed in following through on his promise. That meant he had to plan.*

The major steps required for the clean-up project were:

- *Get large boxes for garbage, giving items away and for storage*
- *Sell unneeded treadmill and work bench on eBay*
- *Sort through items on shelves for 1) keeping, 2) giving away and 3) throwing away*
- *Sort through items on floor (as above)*
- *Drop off give-away items at charity thrift store*
- *Put boxes of throw-away items out on proper day for garbage pick-up*
- *Create efficient cubbyhole and wall-hanging system to store items to be kept, by the following steps:*
 - a) *Assess what would be needed, design system*
 - b) *Go to hardware store to purchase material*
 - c) *Build system*
- *Put everything away in new system*

Arnold made sure all of the commitments he already had were entered in his calendar, so that he could see the amount of time he had available to work on the garage. Arnold started by targeting May 14 for having the entire garage project done. Working backwards from that date, he gave himself two days to build the new arrangement against the garage wall. That meant he had to buy the material by May 12. He allowed himself two days to design the new system, which meant he had to start by May 10. So by May 10, everything unwanted would have to be gone from the garage. If he allowed himself 3 days each to sort through the shelves and the floor items, he had to begin by May 4. Therefore, he had to have the boxes ready by May 4. Selling on eBay would involve waiting for a good bid to come in, so Arnold figured he'd post the eBay items right away.

Working out his plan on paper made it quite clear to Arnold that he had to start on May 4 in order to comfortably finish by May 14. This clarity made the critical difference in keeping Arnold from procrastinating.

Arnold's plan was dependent on his accountability towards fulfilling his promise to get the garage done by a specific date. But what about projects without deadlines?

When You Don't Have a Due Date

Without a deadline, you have the luxury to set your own target date and milestones. So you can set your target dates based on your schedule and comfort level. Instead of working backwards from the final date and plotting the last step first, you can begin with the first step, setting each milestone date until you're done.

The Disadvantage of No Due Date – Many ADDers have a great tendency to procrastinate without the pressure of a deadline. In Arnold's example, if Arnold had not promised his wife he would finish the garage by May 15, he would not be "forced" into beginning on May 4. So he might have continued to procrastinate indefinitely!

If you have a history of putting things off – or simply forgetting about them – you may need to impose a deadline on yourself just to get the project done. Look back at your own habits and tendencies, and choose what strategy you'll follow for planning your projects.

PRIORITIZING: HOW YOU SPEND YOUR TIME

If you had only one project or obligation in your life, time management would simply be a matter of planning. But most people's lives aren't that simple. You probably have to make decisions every day about how you spend that most valuable resource, limited time.

Assuming you have more things to do than time to do it in, you will have to decide what to do, and when. In order to do that, you'll need some criteria to guide your decision.

Typical decision criteria are based on urgency and importance. But sometimes it's difficult to know *which* task or action is the most urgent and important.

Determining Urgency and Importance

Several criteria can guide you in selecting urgency and importance. They include:

- **Consequences**
- **Risk**
- **The Human Element**

CONSEQUENCES – What will be lost or gained as a result of choosing this option?

In the case of Arnold's garage, suppose Arnold's brother invites him to attend a big game on the day that Arnold had planned to build a new shelf system for the garage wall. What should Arnold's priority be, based on the likely consequences of either action?

If Arnold is not able to fit in the shelf-building at a different time, he won't finish the garage on time and his wife will be disappointed. Only Arnold can determine how serious a consequence this would be, depending on what's at stake. If he's been reliable in the past, his wife might not mind. However, if she is near the breaking point over years of Arnold's poor follow-through, consequences could be serious!

RISK – How *likely* is it that one action versus another will bring a positive or negative result?

The importance of risk assessment in your decision will vary, depending on how much risk you are willing to take. ADDers often have a tendency to be impulsive, or more inclined to take risks

than other people. When prioritizing in a matter of time management, you'll want to consciously assess the risk factors instead of being thoughtlessly impulsive.

Arnold might choose to go to the ball game as his priority of the day – instead of creating shelves for the garage -- because he carefully considered his commitments in the time remaining for the deadline. He saw that he would still have an open time block of four hours that evening in which he could complete the shelves. It appeared that the only roadblock to doing the shelves in that time would be his own tendency to procrastination. In the past, being up against a tight deadline had kept Arnold from procrastinating. Arnold assessed the risk of not finishing the shelves as being very small. Therefore, he chose to go with his brother to the ballgame.

For more complex issues, it can be helpful to write out the different factors that go into considering the risk.

Case Study in Prioritizing: Julia's Risk Assessment

- ◆ **Julia** was good at her sales job, but had a history of turning in reports late. She was warned that her job was at stake if she didn't start prioritizing her time better. A report detailing her last five sales calls was due to her boss tomorrow. Julia had cleared the decks to work on it the whole afternoon. But unexpectedly, an urgent call came in from a very lucrative prospect, inviting Julia to make a sales presentation the next morning. Such an important presentation would require hours of preparation.

Based on the potential consequences, both projects were urgent and important. If she didn't turn in the report on time, she was told she could lose her job. If she didn't make the sales presentation, she would lose the chance to make an enormous sale. How could Julia decide her priority for the afternoon?

Julia wrote out the risk factors for each choice and assessed them. For each option, she considered several possible consequences as "risk factors." She then evaluated the likelihood that each of these risks would actually happen.

These are laid out in the chart below.

<u>Preparing for the Sales Presentation</u> – instead of writing report for her boss	
Risk Factor	Assessment of Likelihood
<i>Boss could fire her for not turning in the report.</i>	<i>Unlikely once he heard her reason.</i>
<i>She might not get the sale.</i>	<i>Chances are only 50/50 of making the sale, considering the competition.</i>
<i>Sales presentation could be a waste of time, if she doesn't make the sale.</i>	<p><i>Unlikely because:</i></p> <p><i>1) The chance to gain exposure to an important audience would keep it from being a waste of time.</i></p> <p><i>2) If she got fired, she would make a good impression on people at the prospect company who could help her find another job.</i></p>

<u>Writing the Report for her Boss</u> – instead of preparing for sales presentation	
Risk Factor	Assessment of Likelihood
<i>Boss could fire her for not getting the sale.</i>	<i>Unlikely since she has a good track record as a salesperson.</i>
<i>Boss could think she showed poor judgment in not preparing for such an important presentation.</i>	<i>Very likely – it <u>would</u> indeed be bad judgment.</i>
<i>A poor presentation could hurt her sales career.</i>	<i>Likely. Making a poor impression would reflect badly on the company, and hurt her own reputation in the industry.</i>
<i>Boss may not even read the report tomorrow.</i>	<i>Somewhat likely. The boss cared more that she proves she can turn in reports on time than on actually reading the report.</i>

Seeing the risk factors laid out made it clear to Julia that preparing for the sales presentation would be her priority.

Assessing risk is often a judgment call, and the conclusions reached may vary based on individual circumstances. For instance, in Julia's case, she may have reached a different conclusion about her priority if her boss had told her that she *absolutely* would be fired if she didn't turn in the sales report no matter what.

HUMAN FACTORS – Who will care about your decision, and how important are their feelings?

A final factor to consider in prioritizing is the human element. This area is a bit less tangible than simple consequences and risk, and it is the hardest to analyze. It's easy to stumble in if you make the wrong assumptions about people's needs and motivations.

- **Bob** was an executive on Wall Street who worked long hours handling the accounts of global corporate clients. It was typical for him to cancel plans with his family when a sudden situation would come up at work.

Bob's mother's 80th birthday party had been planned for months. Family members were flying in from all over the country for the Sunday event, and a private room had been rented in a restaurant for the affair.

On the morning of the big day, Bob got an urgent call from the president of his firm. There was a crisis involving a major client worth millions of dollars and Bob's intervention was needed. He was told to immediately fly to Singapore to straighten things out and salvage the account for the firm. Without even considering refusing, Bob quickly packed a bag and asked his wife to convey his regrets to his mother. He assumed she would understand, as she always had before.

Upon returning from his trip, Bob was shocked to find that his family wouldn't speak to him. The millions of dollars at stake involving important global corporations meant nothing compared to how hurt his mother was at his absence. He would never have another chance to make up for the loss.

In weighing priorities, Bob forgot to take into account what was urgent and important to all parties. In reacting in his typical fashion to an urgent crisis at work, he forgot to consider that his mother's once-in-a-lifetime 80th birthday was far more important to his family.

A priority decision where the human factor weighs so heavily is most common where personal life is involved. But it can also happen in work situations when dealing with politically charged issues, or sensitive personalities. Here are a few examples of negative human repercussions at work that can result from your choice of priority:

- Your boss feels threatened by your action
- A colleague or important client feels slighted
- A staff member believes he is not considered important
- An employee feels demoralized and angry
- A supervisor thinks you're not a "team player"

If these people act in a negative way on their feelings – even if they have misinterpreted your motives – the result could be real consequences and risk.

Take a moment to consider your own history of decisions and actions. Have they been a result of conscious decision process, or of thoughtless impulsivity that you've regretted later?

Continuous Improvement in Time Management

Don't get discouraged at your early attempts at time management. If you've struggled with this area all your life, it will take time and patience to become skilled and comfortable at it. Here is how you can be sure to improve quickly:

Make Lots of Mistakes

The more you practice time management, the more you are making time predicting, planning and prioritization a part of your natural repertoire. Remember, the only way to form a habit is repetition! Since trial and error will be a necessary part of your learning process, and repetition requires LOTS of trial and error... you will make lots of miscalculations. These mistakes are wonderful learning experiences for doing it more accurately next time.

Keep a Record of What You've Learned

ADDers have a tendency to not pay conscious attention to their own processes. If you struggle with planning more than other people do, it's probably because those others have paid more

attention to what has gone right or wrong in their previous plans. They assimilate this knowledge into their daily life.

When your brain does not do this naturally, you have to help it by deliberately using a mechanism that will bring your life lessons onto your attentional radar screen.

Maintain a written record of what has worked and not worked in your planning. At each day or stage in your project, write down what has worked or not worked as you had planned, what went wrong, and what you think would have worked better.

Keep this record where you'll know you'll easily find it. You may want to keep one "Planning" or "Lessons Learned" notebook or file, or file each record with the particular project it pertains to.

- **Hint:** You may want to incorporate maintaining the record into a daily ritual at the end of each work-day. You can also use your Intention Log and Time Sense Exercise as records.

Use the Record to Improve Your Planning

Use your knowledge - As you progress in a project, make a point of thinking through how each step could have been improved, and incorporate this knowledge into future steps. When you plan a new project, be sure to go over the notes of your findings so that you don't make the same mistakes again and again.

Notice patterns - Pay special attention to patterns of problems that crop up repeatedly. These are probably indications that there is a particular area of planning that needs to be changed. Analyze what these patterns have in common, to help determine your solution.

- ◆ *Haley noticed that several steps of her work projects were thrown off schedule, despite her very conservative estimates of how long these steps would take to perform. Since she had become pretty accurate in her time estimations, these continual anomalies were annoying and perplexing. Haley initially could think of nothing these steps had in common that would provide an explanation. Upon going over her records, however, she noticed that every time, the deadline that was missed fell on a Monday. Thinking this through, she concluded that less productive work got done on Monday for three reasons: 1) many of the staff entered an inefficient "weekend" mood on Friday afternoon; 2) since issues piled up over the weekend, many more emails and customer*

calls came in on Monday than on any other day of the week, and 3) more employees were absent on Fridays and Mondays than on other days of the week.

For planning purposes, Haley realized she should always add in an extra day for any step with a completion date that fell on a Monday. If she had not had her records to review, she would not have known how to improve this glitch in her scheduling.

PRACTICE

These suggested assignments are optional. Creating intentional strategies around clutter and disorganization -- and entering them into your Intention Log -- will go far towards helping you quickly develop organized habits.

Planning

Consider a project that you would like to plan, using the techniques you've learned. Create a simple project plan by writing out these answers for your project:

- Goal of Project:
- Due Date: (either real or self-imposed)
- What are the action steps Involved?
(*TIP: Mind-Mapping might help you get down all the steps more easily.*)
- Which steps involve other people?
(*Include contacting those people as one of your early actions!*)
- List steps that must be done in a particular order, from first to last.
Next to each step, estimate the amount of time it requires.
- What are the milestone dates by which each major step must be completed?
Work backwards from your due date to determine milestone dates, starting with the last step. (*Use the "Arnold's Garage" example as a model*).
- What dates must you begin each step?
Determine this by working backwards, based on the time you predict to complete each step, and taking into account your other commitments.

Do you realistically have time to complete this project to your satisfaction if you start now?

If not, what roadblocks are in your way? What can you do about them? Can you delegate any steps to others?

What would have been your usual tendency regarding how you'd plan or do this project?

What insights has this Planning Exercise given you about any past difficulties you've had with managing time?

Prioritizing

Consider the way you've been prioritizing your time when you've had two or more choices of things to do.

- What have your activity choices been mostly based on?
 - your interest level _____
 - the crisis of an immediate deadline _____
 - whatever came into your mind at the time _____
 - whatever was closest at hand _____
 - whatever was easiest to do _____

Consider two tasks or projects that you currently need to work on, that are similar in urgency and importance. Assume you have a block of several hours available today to work on one of them. List them as A and B.

Project A: _____

Project B: _____

Using additional paper, compare each project using the following criteria: *Use mindmapping or chart.*

- What are the consequences involved in each choice?
- What are the risks for each, or likelihood of each consequence happening?
- What human factors should be considered?
- Can you think of other criteria that would be useful in your decision?

Based on your analysis, which project should you work on?

Your likelihood for success: Keeping some kind of written record of observations is the most powerful way you'll be able to coach yourself into improving your habits.

- How likely is it that you will commit to making any kind of written observations?
- If unlikely, based on what you've learned, what are some steps you can take to overcome your objections?