

Those Lazy, Hazy, Crazy Days of Summer

Julie Todaro

Managers and employees alike are *never* on the same schedule, really. Although organizations can strive to create timelines that address both general and specific due dates for activities and work products, the reality is that productivity times, general professional issues, individual professional issues, personal issues such as vacations and health concerns and—given these are just internal to the library—all of the above for upper-level managers and the organization in general *and* the umbrella organization *and* partnerships *and* community and patron issues, it's a wonder we get anything turned in on time, much less completed. So what's a librarian to do?

Self-Involvement in Perspective

A manager's first goal is to make everyone aware of the bigger picture. And this responsibility goes beyond the manager's first job of articulating the bigger picture or vision of the organization; it means that managers must work with employees to assist them in identifying how the bigger picture relates to their own specific responsibilities and timelines. While all employees must take care of themselves and their own responsibilities, there are several ways to balance employee excessive self-involvement.

Employees should design their ongoing responsibilities and individual projects after consulting with all those who might be involved, such as colleagues, other departments, committees, and external and internal partners. Will their timelines jive with other goals and timelines? If an employee's project completion is dependent on the gathering of data, will the data-gathering group be able to coordinate schedules for gathering data? If a software patch is needed to establish a new service, will the design of the patch be possible by needed timelines?

Do employee goals relate to their departmental or functional area goals? Employees need to work with their managers to ensure that their own work goals meet the needs of the department, and if they don't dovetail specifically with departmental goals, are they possible or appropriate for work responsibilities?

In general, do individual goals require new training or development and if so, is there time and money? Does

the employee need to expend organizational money to be successful in the responsibility or project (such as software that needs to be purchased) and if so, is there funding or time to purchase the item?

If a goal or objective or strategy was approved at the beginning of work year and many changes have occurred, is the project by the individual still feasible? Or have budgets changed? Staffing issues precipitated changes?

Signals

Managers should establish their own signals, learn to read signals, and assess the organization for signals that communicate outside the standard communication methods and teach others to read signals as well. There are several signals to look for, including rumors in general, but especially the existence of more rumors than normal. Typically rumors *do* have kernels of truth, and more rumors than usual are indicators of possible changes and deviations from the norm.

Excessive staff absences are indicators—obviously—of reduced work productivity overall but certainly of deadlines that might not be met. Even one missed deadline signals the coming domino effect of other missed deadlines and delayed projects.

Variances or changes in “standard operating procedures” within an organization may indicate upcoming problems, such as no meetings, e-mails, or communications when you are used to several or many, more or many meetings or e-mails when you are used to little communication, or a sudden change in a management style of an upper-level manager.

Time Clocks

Just as when the clock hits five o'clock or when the Monday of Thanksgiving week rolls around or when December 20



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rears its holiday head, the first of June appears to be the universal symbol for *slow down* and *don't work so hard* and *deadlines don't matter*. These times or situations are signals to people to exhibit behaviors that can be ingrained, driven by society or general expectations.

Managers need to ensure that work projects are completed in a timely fashion no matter the societal or organizational time clock. While some staff slow down or while some work habits change because the client or customer base changes, others change because their inner clock shifts (they may not even know it) and others change because colleagues around them change. But managers need to outline some expectations for employees for dealing with time clocks.

Managers need to identify existing or design new timelines and then disseminate timelines to their employees that include the organization's "due dates," umbrella organization time elements, timelines from external partners, and external influences as well as overall community and societal timelines.

Before goals or timelines are designed, organizational and individual or societal time clocks should be consulted. For example, nothing should be due to be completed the Monday after Thanksgiving. Managers should assist employees in designing realistic goals.

Before goals or timelines are approved, managers must either ask employees to ascertain or they should assess all goals and timelines to see if they intersect or conflict with each other in design, timing, and support.

Managers must review existing timelines initially and then establish processes for ongoing monitoring of organizational elements throughout the work year.

Life Situations

Just as organizations have lives that must be monitored and assessed, individual lives and life situations must be continuously assessed by individual employees to identify changes necessary to ensure that work is completed. These life situations, considered the unexpected or temporary situations that arise, are often confidential in nature and although managers need to allow for them and ask employees to organize their workflow and work product around them, they often shouldn't be discussed either with the individuals themselves or—for sure—the public. Some examples include:

- Staff illnesses
- Illness or care-related situations of staff members, relatives of staff, friends, or significant others
- Celebratory events such as weddings, religious events, or graduations
- Events and activities of the partners of the organization or partners in organizational functions (such as shared buildings, shared networks, or automation systems)

- Romances or the lack thereof or issues surrounding the beginning or end of relationships
- Outside projects such as volunteer work (political, professional organization or association work, etc.)
- Outside situations such as secondary employment

Managers—avoiding direct discussions on inappropriate or confidential issues—can ask employees to consider a longer list of elements in organizing their workflow and timelines, and while many arise based on uncontrolled situations and circumstances, some can be allowed for in timelines and planning.

Passages

Passages are life situations but on a much bigger scale and, rather than being temporary, are thought of by Gail Sheehy as "passages"; that is, those changes that are permanent and often cause major behavior changes. Passage examples (many of a personal nature and needing confidential treatment) include:

- General "getting older" issues of the employee or those of individuals surrounding the employee
- Illness or conditions that leave permanent changes in employees that might change how an employee might complete work or carry out job responsibilities
- Death of another employee or those in employees' lives
- Major changes to the work environment such as reorganizations or changes in management after many years

As in life situations, managers—again handling legally and confidentially—can ask employees to consider the longer list of elements in organizing their workflow and timelines and while many arise based on uncontrolled situations and circumstances and can be longer lasting, some can be allowed for, in timelines and planning. As with life situations in general, the most important thing is that managers and employees alike must realize that productivity peaks may well be able to integrated into, when possible, the business of the organization.

Save Yourself

Managers can and should organize their own workflow with as many factors in hand as possible. But success of any individual is—as all managers know and more often than not—dependent on the success of *all* individuals in an organization. Spending extensive energy establishing timelines and assessing others' timelines and workflows *and* asking others to self-assess to design the most achievable goals is time well spent and avoids the inevitable lazy, hazy, crazy (and unproductive) days of summer.