

# Where's the time for me?

*Make time for yourself to avoid stress and the risk of burn-out says Robyn Pearce*

At the recent Australian Boarding Schools Association Conference in Canberra I asked the audience: "What are your greatest challenges in relation to time?"

Not only did I get the usual ones such as interruptions, email, procrastination, how to prioritise and staying motivated, but in a larger proportion than usual came the cry: 'How do I find time for my family, and how do I find time for me?'

This same issue comes from every teaching group. However, when your busiest work hours are before and after school and yet normal school hours are also work hours for you, essentially you're never off the job even when asleep – unless you are very deliberate about it. Although many boarding establishments (especially the larger ones) have good staff rosters, it was surprising how many of those wonderful people found it very hard to step away, to know when to say 'No'.

I've thought about this topic a lot. In fact, this ability to say no is, I firmly believe, the most valuable time management tool we have.

The problem often is that senior and/or very responsible people are reluctant to risk the wheels falling off. And teachers, by the very nature of their work, are wired to care about others, are wired to serve.

Of course, this issue isn't restricted just to teachers. One of the hardest things for anyone who loves their work, who consistently goes the extra mile, who naturally enjoys being supportive and helpful (and I include myself in this category), is to know when to stop. Especially when we're first learning a new job, or there's a major project on, it's very difficult to know when to let go.

Of course there are times when we just have to knuckle down and complete a task. Perhaps something's got an urgent deadline, or by working long hours for a short time we'll create a block of free time. However, pushing our endurance limits all the time is not only poor time management but also has all manner of repercussions.

## So, what can we do about it?

Try these two tips. The first one is a macro solution; the second is a day-by-day fabulous and simple survival strategy.

Remove yourself from temptation – get away from your environment (and don't take work with you)

Harvey, a regional school advisor, was asked by one of his principals to speak to a young first year teacher. It was nearly half-way through the first



year. Amanda was very keen and doing great work, but her principal had begun to worry about her. Her car was first in the car park every morning, last to leave each night. Any time he was at school she was there, and when he drove past the school on weekends her car would be there again.

The advisor could immediately see why her principal was concerned: Amanda was treading a rocky path with an almost guaranteed result – burnout and stress-related illness.

Over a coffee, Harvey gave her the following advice. 'At least once a month, have a completely free weekend. Leave school on Friday night at the same time as the children. Take no work home. If possible, leave town. Don't arrive at

school on Monday morning until you need to.'

Harvey described to me what happened: "She looked at me with relief. It was as if rocks had rolled off her shoulders. She'd become so bogged down with all the new things she wanted to learn and achieve that she'd lost sight of the end goal – to have a great teaching career. The very next weekend she was gone – having fun. I believe her principal's timely intervention is what saved a bright young woman for our industry."

## Take power naps

Usually when I talk about this the bulk of the audience look at me with disbelief. I was delighted with my boarding people that at least

a third of the 200 people in the room nodded their heads with approval – because they were already doing it.

There is a direct correlation between a tiring and less productive afternoon and taking no real brain breaks.

Here's the explanation. Various biological rhythms flow through our body all day, all night. Ultradian rhythms are just one sort. Loosely translated ultra = many and dian = day – the many rhythms of the day. They cycle continuously through our body like rolling waves – 90 – 120 minutes up; 20 minutes down – repeated day and night.

The down cycle is not a negative thing – instead it's the rest cycle that our body needs to recharge, rebuild and to grow. If we keep pushing through these down cycles, if we don't give our body a chance to recharge, we push the poor old thing into flight or fight. The consequence? You already know. Stress, exhaustion, burnout and sickness.

Almost everyone I've challenged on this has agreed that they become less effective in the afternoon if they keep pushing on. They end up dragging their weary body home at the end of the day – not much use to themselves or loving family waiting for their share of time. Nor much use to their employer.

So what to do about it? Don't work all day as if you're a machine. Even machines have to stop for servicing! Morning and afternoon tea breaks and a lunch break away from your normal tasks – they're some of the simple solutions. Winston Churchill is probably our most famous power napper – this simple technique kept him operating at full steam through all those tough war years.

In many countries people nap after lunch

either at their desks or in special nap rooms. And what about the famous continental siesta? Do a Google for 'power naps' – here's a couple of links: [http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/18/asia\\_letter/main2020370.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/18/asia_letter/main2020370.shtml) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2171773.stm>

And I must tell you about an Australian company I've just been introduced to. It not only educates people about this same issue but also has products to support you. Have a look at <http://www.metronaps.com.au/>

If you're a classroom teacher you might find it harder to create gaps, but there are all manner of creative ways to rest your eyes. Even if you can't get a power nap, at least regularly step away from your work environment, get outdoors, recharge and refresh yourself.

A comment from Richard Stokes, the ABSA Executive Director, after my speech: "Sometimes we just need someone to give us

permission to do what we know in our heart of hearts is the solution; to know that it's ok to put boundaries around the time we make available for others."

What marker will you put in the ground to enhance your quality of life? Circumstances will move to accommodate you – once you make the commitment.

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Robyn Pearce is an international author and speaker. Check out [www.gettingagrip.com](http://www.gettingagrip.com) for heaps of tips on time saving.

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In March 2009, Australia will host the first official International Cricket Council governed Women's Cricket World Cup. Defending World Cup champions Australia will take on India, England, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, West Indies, South Africa and Pakistan in the month long tournament showcasing the best female cricketers from around the world.

The 2009 ICC Women's World Cup education program is:

- Free of charge and downloadable from [cricket.com.au](http://cricket.com.au) from October 2008
- Designed to be taught in upper primary and/or lower secondary schools
- Meet relevant curriculum framework learning outcomes across a variety of key learning areas
- Provide students with an opportunity to interact, showcase work and publicly celebrate the 2009 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup.



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