Advisory

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) is an advisory and consultative organization composed of the CEOs of each of the 72 District School Boards in Ontario; Public, Catholic and French Language.

"To be the most effective person you can be, including being an effective time manager, you will need to be sure to preserve and enhance the greatest asset you have – 'you' – through establishing priorities and assigning time."

Covey, Stephen. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Establishing Priorities and Assigning Time

Why is it important to establish priorities and assign time?

Each day, every month, time pressures for senior leaders seem to increase. Day-to-day events significantly influence key priorities and may require supervisory officers to reschedule important tasks that support improved student instruction. It is easy for system leaders to be distracted from a consistent focus on the end goal – improved student achievement and well-being. Ever-increasing complexity and accessibility through technology has had a major impact on instructional leadership, organizational structures, strategic planning, collaboration, and professional reflection. Given these challenges, it is essential for supervisory officers to establish priorities and assign reasonable timelines to all tasks and expectations.

What are some effective practices for establishing priorities?

The following strategies can assist supervisory officers to maintain a focus on the important priorities and responsibilities of their role:

1. Prioritizing

Prioritizing obligations and tasks will assist in responding to unexpected time pressures and lead to greater effectiveness.

2. Identifying Key Responsibilities

Reflective questioning helps identify and maintain important priorities. The following questions are examples:

- Ministry of Education: Are we managing effectively the reporting requirements to the Ministry, or allowing them to impact the amount and quality of leadership that supervisory officers and support staff provide to students, teachers, principals, and parents?

- Corporate Board: Is the board supporting student learning as its number one priority? Are board discussions and decisions focussed on achieving the goals of the multi-year plan?

- Supervisory Officers: How much time is spent talking about and supporting student achievement? How much time is spent visiting schools and asking the right questions to support the learning of all students? What are the distractions that take away from this priority?

- District Leadership Team: Does the district leadership team, including principals and support staff, focus on improving student outcomes and well-being, or is too much of their energy devoted to operations and organizational issues?

- Principals: Do principals spend enough time visiting classes and supporting teachers in their efforts to increase student achievement and close the achievement gap?
- Community: Is adequate time devoted to supporting and working with community members and addressing parent concerns? Are parents engaged and active in the schools? Do they feel supported in helping their children learn at home?

3. Assessing Impact

While it is impossible to eliminate unexpected and unscheduled emergency tasks, prioritizing and planning is a critical strategy. One method of accommodating multiple tasks within time constraints is to assess the impact of competing priorities.

- Rank multiple items according to a scale that places the task first that will have the greatest consequence if left undone. Then rank other tasks second, third, etc., until all the tasks have been listed according to the impact of neglecting or delaying them. The following scale could be considered for the ranking:
  - absolutely necessary, must be completed.
  - necessary, but not very time-sensitive.
  - not necessary, but helpful if accomplished.
- The objective of the ranking is to organize responsibilities so that the immediate, essential task is always accomplished; the necessary is addressed; and the occasional advantageous task is completed.

4. Delegating

Support by administrative assistants and related staff can assist in managing time constraints and emerging responsibilities. Effective time management draws upon the skills of colleagues who, when given the responsibility, can often assist in responding to general and system inquiries and written correspondence. It is important to share with your administrative assistant plans, schedules, and responsibilities for the day. Working together, the most immediate tasks can be identified and a process for completing them agreed upon.

5. Planning

Individuals may choose a variety of processes to address time priorities and requirements. However, it is essential to establish a planning process to manage time and tasks. Daily plans must match the job description and responsibilities of supervisory officers, but they must also be flexible and responsive to emerging needs because crisis situations will arise and must be attended to immediately.

The following activities are further strategies for planning priorities and time:

a) Set Personal Goals: Personal goals offer a destination and vision to work towards.

b) Keep a To-Do List: Maintaining and revising a list of tasks will assist in managing work and meeting priorities. A To-Do list is much more effective when it includes time allocations, actions, and staff support. A To-Do list without specific direction is not nearly as helpful as one which details actions and planned results.

c) Control "Busyness": Just being busy does not mean that tasks are being completed. Effective managers know how to deal with distractions, busyness, and the temptation to give attention to tasks that are not priorities.

d) Manage Energy: Individuals have periods of peak performance. It is important to recognize this distribution of energy and schedule high-value priorities during peak times. Energy is a renewable commodity and supervisory officers need to structure opportunities and time during their daily schedules to both reflect and refresh.

e) Avoid Multi-Tasking: Many believe that multi-tasking is an effective strategy to deal with time constraints and priorities. However, recent research indicates that it is more effective to complete tasks in sequence, giving each one due attention.

What are some effective practices for maximizing time?

After identifying a process for establishing priorities that works well, supervisory officers should further identify a method to extend and allocate time. The following strategies apply to ongoing responsibilities:

1. Ministry of Education

- The Ministry of Education makes requests and requires reports throughout the year. In order to manage the annual expectations that impact staff time, it is useful to create a timetable setting out when reports are due. This timetable will assist the staff to anticipate completion dates and organize a schedule to accommodate both system and Ministry reports.

- Identifying strategies that will allow system and Ministry reports to be merged and/or completed at the same time is an effective method to reduce duplication.

2. Corporate Board

It is effective to share with members of the board the time that is required for supervisory officers to build support and agreement for board priorities and to implement the multi-year plan. Informing trustees of schedules for school visits, professional development activities for the staff, Ministry of Education meetings, and professional conferences is a worthwhile strategy to build understanding about the responsibilities of supervisory officers.

Working with the corporate board to maximize board meeting effectiveness and reduce meeting overlap can also be very helpful. The following questions may serve as an impetus to review and support board priorities:

- Are there more appropriate organizational structures that will assist both trustees and supervisory officers to improve time allocations?

- Are senior staff meetings properly co-ordinated to meet all committee and board meeting timelines?

- Are board and senior staff meetings co-ordinated to allow efficient time for board and Ministry of Education reports?

3. Supervisory Officers

It is important for supervisory officers to make student achievement and school visits a priority. When scheduling visits, supervisory officers should consider the following:

- How can schedules be altered to maximize time spent in schools?

- What are the most appropriate and effective times to visit schools?

- Can we schedule system administrative meetings when schools are busy with operational issues, thus freeing up more time for supervisory officers to visit schools when their visits will be most effective?

For example, at the beginning and end of each term, visits to schools may be minimized, providing supervisory officers with more time to engage in leadership team meetings and discuss planning and operational issues. One strategy that a number of supervisory officers use is to schedule administrative and executive council meetings on a specific day and time for the entire year. Having an annual schedule supports supervisory officers as they plan for other meetings and school visits.

Resources

EQAO. (2005). *Working Together for Student Success: A School Improvement Planning Guide*. http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/05/05p043e.pdf

Fullan, Michael. (2006). *Turnaround Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Leadership Library in Education.

Mind Tools. *Time Management*. http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_HTE.htm

Ministry of Education. *Ontario's Leadership Framework*. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/framework.html

Ministry of Education. *Ontario Leadership Strategy*. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/actionplan.html

The de Bono Group. *The Course in Creativity*. http://www.deBonogroup.com/course_in_creativity.php

Wick, Calhoun W. and Leon, Lu Stanton. (1993). *The Learning Edge: How Smart Managers and Smart Companies Stay Ahead*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
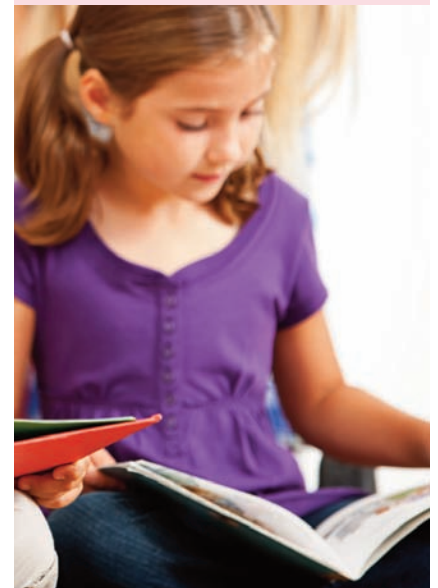
4. Principals

Over the past years the role of the principal has changed substantially. Principals have direct responsibility for increased student achievement and well-being and need to be in their schools on a regular basis. Often supervisory officers are responsible for asking principals to attend meetings and sessions requiring them to leave their schools.

When organizing meetings for principals, supervisory officers must be aware of the number of times principals are asked to be away from the school. Creating a structure that respects time in school for principals must be an important consideration for supervisory officers. With technology, there are a number of opportunities to communicate with principals without bringing them together to meet outside the school. Email, blogs, websites, and telephone calls can be time-savers that allow principals to be more effective in their role as school leaders.

What are some effective practices for developing annual calendars?

It is a worthwhile strategy to create a system calendar to identify when reports are required and system deadlines must be met. Many boards develop system calendars that are posted online so all board staff are aware of meetings, due dates for reports, and board events. The Ministry has a web-based professional development calendar which can be accessed. Including the following areas in a system calendar can be helpful:

- Budget: Include details about the budget development process and timelines. Refer to *CODE Advisory No. 15, Budget Development Process* for additional information.
- Curriculum: Align program reviews with The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat reports, Education Quality and Accountability Office time lines, and the board plan.
- Human Resources: Timelines identified in collective agreements must be followed. Communicating changes in staffing allocations and personnel according to collective agreements and board policy are essential to creating confidence in the organization and building respect within the system. Refer to *CODE Advisory No. 18, Working Effectively with Federations and Unions*.
- Plant: It is helpful to identify improvements and pending improvements with clear, realistic timelines to establish board and community expectations and detail budget requirements. Boards have a number of strategies to communicate this information (e.g. the board website, through schools and school councils, and by involving principals, unions, and federations.)

If as a supervisory officer, I require more information, what should I do?

- Explore options and solutions with your senior management team.
- Speak with other directors/ superintendents in your district.
- Identify additional resources through professional organizations such as the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE).
- Attend seminars and relevant workshops on time management strategies.