

# Time Management Solutions for County 4-H Professionals

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## 11. Don't be a doormat

You are a professional. You should expect others to treat you as a professional. Always. The first time you are treated unprofessionally by a volunteer/committee, brush it off. Second time, retrain. Third time, amputate. No exceptions. Subsequent political fallout is usually exaggerated, so why keep giving your emotional time to these folks?

## 12. Co-schedule meetings

Once you've already given up an evening or weekend, why not get the most bang for your time buck? Many volunteers serve on several committees and will appreciate less driving thanks to this coordinated approach.

## 1. Hire or delegate

The expectations on 4-H professionals still mirror the era when financial support was 2x higher and volunteers gave more substantive time. Just because we are awesome, does not mean we should be doing the job of two people! If you can hire or delegate the work of that 2<sup>nd</sup> person great, but if not, multiple programs need to incrementally<sup>4</sup> end.

## 10. Consolidate teen leadership

If your Junior Fair Board, Ambassadors, Camp Counselors, and/or Junior Leaders groups all have similar faces involved, is it time to consolidate? If you are still teaching 8 to 12 stand-alone camp counselor training sessions rather than a comprehensive overnighter, are your counselors any better prepared than they'd be otherwise?

## 2. Attend four or less local committees

As Gen X and Millennial volunteers increasingly comprise committees, the proverbial *death by meeting*<sup>2</sup> will be less tolerated. Take advantage and reduce the number of local committees. If the only reason specialized committees exist is because of personality conflicts, mediate the conflict rather than duplicate meetings.

## 9. De-silo your office team<sup>3</sup>

The future of Extension is multi-disciplinary, so make it work for you! What committee and community relations roles are better suited to your ANR or FCS colleagues? When working on a local curriculum or innovative event can you enrich the final product (and save time) by employing the expertise of these colleagues?

## 3. Shorten your summer camp

As costs rise and time is more crunched for our high-performing youth (i.e. would-be counselors), a shorter summer camp may be a win-win for all. If your camp facility is amenable, reduce your camp by a day and listen for feedback. You will also be amazed at how a reduction of 24 hours improves your personal recovery time.

## 8. Delete a legacy program

The hardest programs to end are the ones that feel like sacred cows to volunteers or former staffers, even when the program is past its prime. After you've carefully negotiated the process of deleting one of these programs, making other program improvements is a breeze!

## 4. Limit programs lacking impact

We should not offer low-impact programming<sup>1</sup>, but sometimes your position requires you to offer trainings and programs that lack *local* impact. In these cases, reduce the number of times you offer these programs even if it means increasing audience size beyond best learning practices. After all, what did the learners really lose?

## 7. Skip the fair

I really had you going there for a minute, eh?! On a serious note, be sure that your fair week involvement is meaningful. If you are advising, mediating, promoting, or supporting then keep it up! If you are sitting, waiting, or arguing then find a better use for your work time. Be an educator not a babysitter.

## 5. Reduce JFB meetings

Most Junior Fair Boards meet year-round with perhaps a small break right after a fair. Why? Does it take 11 months to fully prepare for the next year's fair? If so, leave it alone, but you may discover that an 8 month JFB gets the job done just as well and ensures a full meeting agenda each month.

## 6. Meet with a purpose

Make sure you are a member of groups that respect your professional time. If these are required internal meetings (e.g. EERA, camp board, design team, CED) advocate for purpose with the event leader or committee chair.

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education faculty/staff are more productive in colleges supporting positive work-life balance<sup>5</sup>. One of the key factors associated with this balance is schedule control. Historically, the schedule of the typical county-based 4-H professional has not been easily controlled. Politics, legacy programs, opinionated volunteers, and office dynamics all weigh heavily on the 4-H professional's schedule-making process. This creates an environment of the cart leading the horse which harms workplace satisfaction and employee retention.

In previous time management sessions led by the author, participants learned to "live more by the compass instead of the calendar" which created a helpful macro-understanding of time management. However, 4-H professionals are notably pragmatic and have expressed interest in micro-solutions. This poster provides twelve such time management solutions with the county-based 4-H professional in mind.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

County-based Extension 4-H Professionals will:

1. Understand the connection between schedule control and positive work-life balance.
2. Consider twelve targeted solutions for reducing unnecessary workload in local programming, committee structures, and service efforts.
3. Critique their own programming schedules in time to refine 2017 county 4-H calendars with improved time management principles.

## DISCUSSION

Extension 4-H work is invaluable to local communities throughout Ohio. Positive impacts are generated in civic society, education, and entrepreneurship. Though the work is meaningful, 4-H Professional turnover remains high. Improving work-life balance through time management solutions is a key step to reversing this trend. As one award-winning 4-H Professional noted, "Our volunteers are passionate. Which means they will take as much as you are willing to give them." Finding the right amount to give is key.

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