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It's Crunch Time



It's Crunch Time

The end of the term must be near because nearly all the new faculty members I've heard from are holding their breath, trying to keep their heads above water, and praying for the end of the term! The feelings of exhaustion and frustration I hear repeatedly are both intense and predictable. As a result, let's focus on some concrete ways to deal with Common New Faculty Mistake #15: **Failing to Recognize and Adjust to the Rhythms of the Term.**

Each term has a natural energetic rhythm (whether you're on semesters or quarters). You share students' high energy at the beginning, it flattens out during the middle (as reality sinks in), and the end of the term finds you dragging from some combination of disappointment, frustration, exhaustion, and/or departmental drama. While most new faculty members feel tired, cranky, and completely out of gas the last two weeks of every term, the end of the spring term is particularly difficult because it's also the end of the academic year. So if you find yourself feeling bone-weary, that's perfectly normal! This week, I encourage you to recognize the current intensity you're experiencing for what it is: a predictable rhythm of the term. Knowing this is a recurring pattern should enable you to be gentle with yourself and make behavioral adjustments that will allow you not only to survive but thrive during the end-of-term crunch time. And if you're on the quarter system, keep these tips in your pocket for the end of the spring quarter!

10 Tips for Thriving During Crunch Time

I believe that stressful times call for unique coping strategies. The following tips are the collected wisdom from my own mentors about how they maintain sanity during the end-of-term crunch. The underlying theme is that when you're pressed for time, you must be proactive, strategic, and clear about how you spend each moment. Too often when things get hectic, we sacrifice our own needs so that everyone else's can get met. Instead, each of these suggestions is aimed at minimizing the things that don't matter so that you can move through the busiest time of the year without surrendering your health or productivity.

Tip #1: Clearly Communicate To Others That It Is Crunch Time

Let those who live with you and/or are impacted by your behavior know that the next week (or two) will be difficult, assure them that it's a finite period of time, and let them know you appreciate their support and understanding. I find that people are willing to assist me when I communicate my needs ahead of time.

Tip #2: Lower Your Standards In Non-essential Areas Of Life

I'm what's known as a neat freak. During crunch time, I give myself permission to be a slob. It's OK because it's only one week. I love to eat out, but during crunch time, I'm OK with peanut butter and pickle sandwiches because I don't have time for anything else. And that's OK because it's only one week. Typically, I sleep nine hours per night. During crunch time, I sleep nine hours per night. And that's because sleep is not negotiable for me! The point is to ask yourself: what can I let slide a bit for the next week (or two) without negative consequences?

Tip #3: Ruthlessly Assess What Grading ACTUALLY Needs To Get Done

Many students do not read comments that are given on final papers and projects. Upon the suggestion of one of my mentors, I developed the habit of asking my students ahead of time to indicate if they want me to write comments on their final papers. Fewer than 10 percent requested the comments, and I saved hours of grading that would never have been read while concentrating my comment-writing on the students who genuinely wanted feedback.

Tip #4: Say NO To EVERY SERVICE REQUEST From Now Until The End Of The Semester

If you are struggling to find time to complete all of the things on your to-do list, it makes no sense to add more items. In other words, when your time is scarce, one of the worst things you can do is to take on any additional responsibilities. **Say "no" often, clearly, and without guilt.**

Tip #5: Every Day Needs A Plan

Take 30 minutes on Sunday night to get your to-do list out of your head and onto a piece of paper. Then force yourself to place each of your tasks onto a specific time in your calendar. If you don't have enough time for the tasks, then delegate them, re-negotiate the deadline, or let them go. This **Sunday Meeting** will clarify your week and force you to make the tough decisions in advance. Then each morning, you only need to spend two minutes reviewing the items you must complete for that day. This will keep you focused and confident that the truly important things will get done.

Tip #6: Write For At Least 30 Minutes Each Day

When new faculty feel crunched for time, one of the first things they are ready to sacrifice is their daily writing! This term, put yourself, your future, and your daily writing time into the non-negotiable category (along with classes and meetings). There are MANY other ways to be efficient besides eliminating the one activity that is central to your promotion, tenure, and long-term professional success.

Tip #7: Only Check E-mail One Time Per Day (Max)

E-mail begets more e-mail. When you have little time, the least effective way to spend it is writing e-mails. I'm only able to restrict my e-mail to once a day during crunch times, but for one week, it's unlikely to cause a crisis and typically works out just fine.

Tip #8: Eliminate Unnecessary Electronic Distractions

If you subscribe to any listservs, sign off until the term is over. Many people sign off during the summer, so why not just do so now? Listservs create lots of e-mail in your inbox, very little of which is critical information that you can't do without between now and graduation. While you're at it, why not take a respite from all electronic time-wasters: Facebook, Twitter, television, etc.

Tip #9: Take Care Of Your Body

Exercise reduces stress. When I don't have time to go to the gym, I opt for using the stairs instead of elevators in buildings, take quick walks at lunch time, or just put on some music for five minutes and dance like a toddler who just found a cup of coffee. Be creative! Whatever you need to do to get your heart rate up and your body moving will benefit you during crunch time.

Tip #10: End Every Day With Gratitude And A Treat!

As each day comes to a close, take a moment to thank the universe for all the things that went well and affirm that everything in your life is working for your highest good. I insist on a treat every day during crunch time because I deserve it. So do you!

The Weekly Challenge

This week, I challenge you to:

- Acknowledge that the end of every term is a stressful time and THAT IS PERFECTLY NORMAL!
- Use the tips outlined above to proactively create strategies to manage your stress, frustration, and energy levels.
- Write every day this week for *at least* 30 minutes.

This week, I hope that you find the strength to try some new end-of-term strategies, the creativity to adapt them to your unique situation, and the comfort of knowing that you are not alone in your struggle.

Peace and Productivity,



Kerry Ann Rockquemore, PhD

President, National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity

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