

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Productivity for Librarians: How to Get More Done In Less Time. By Samantha Hines. Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2010. 158 pages (soft cover). ISBN 978-1-84334-567-1. US\$80.00.

Finding the time to read a book about productivity and time management may pose its own challenges, but Samantha Hines' short publication is a worthwhile investment of that time. This book is set in the context of the library workplace and speaks to a scenario familiar to many librarians: rapidly changing technology; an "always on" culture of 24/7 information availability; changing priorities and demands; and sometimes professional expectations for tenure, promotion, service and other achievements. Hines, an academic reference librarian at the University of Montana, writes with an engaging, easy-to-read style as she shares her own experiences with the struggle for productivity to reach her professional goals and achieve work-life balance. She draws upon current best principles of productivity, reflects upon their usefulness, and describes how they will work for the reader.

The book is well organized into logical chapters, with each chapter broken into easily digested sections; it can be read as an entire piece or selectively. While not a scholarly discourse, Hines does ground her insights and discussions in recent and classic literature on worker productivity. The real value of the book is its practicality; useful tips and strategies are provided that can be used immediately as well as integrated more thoughtfully in the longer term. Hines incorporates small written exercises or quizzes to aid in reflection and understanding. The exercises are not onerous, and should be undertaken to get the most out of the book.

The book opens with a framing of the context of productivity for librarians in Chapter 1. Hines asks the reader to reflect upon and engage with three questions while reading the book: What patterns in my life do I want to change? Am I committed to making changes? and What will happen if I become more productive?

The following three chapters deal with the primary issues of productivity: motivation, procrastination, and time management. The chapter on motivation focuses on self-awareness of working rhythms, setting goals, achieving work-life balance, avoiding burnout, and setting limits. Along with the discussion on setting limits is a straightforward approach to saying "no", a challenge for many librarians. Chapter 2 also looks at the motivating or demotivating aspects of our workspaces and introduces the TRAF acronym (toss it out; refer it; act on it; file it).

Chapter 3 deals with procrastination, a topic that Hines confesses that she became very familiar with while writing this book. She highlights some of the causes of procrastination including perfectionism, fear, avoidance, and poor impulse control, and offers tips to minimize procrastination.

"Dealing with e-mail" is a frank discussion of its productivity-disrupting and addictive nature. Hines offers some solutions including checking e-mail twice daily, keeping the e-mail program closed except for scheduled times, dealing with e-mail using the TRAF procedure, and reserving at least the first hour of the day as an e-mail-free zone. The rest of the chapter provides further guidance on dealing with distractions and staying on task using techniques such as time-limit setting and effective to-do lists that break down tasks and incorporate rewards.

Time management is the focus of Chapter 4, which opens with a quiz to determine readers' current skills as well as a journal exercise to keep track of a week of activities. The results assist in setting up a productive schedule of time and activities. Hines makes the point that effective time management requires knowing how you use your time and ensuring that your time is under your control. The rest of the chapter offers suggestions for defending your time, explodes the myth of productive multitasking, and provides direction on setting priorities, delegating, and dealing with meetings and workplace disruptions. The chapter ends with an overview of print and electronic scheduling and calendar tools.

Chapter 5 provides a very useful review of seven major recent productivity systems, including classics like Steven Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. In Chapter 6, "Managing for Productivity", Hines applies the principles of time management and productivity to library managers, with tips to produce healthier and more productive workplaces.

Staying on track with new-found productivity is the focus of Chapter 7, a welcome recognition that starting a new habit is often easier than maintaining it. Suggestions for long-term success with new productivity goals include integrating small changes over a sufficient length of time; using a habit worksheet to track changes; visualizing the desired change; and making yourself accountable. In this chapter Hines also offers three strategies for maintaining focus or becoming unstuck in the quest for productivity. The media diet is a recommendation to significantly reduce the number of sources of news and information media and amount of time spent on them. Another strategy, the review process, outlines how a daily, monthly, and annual review of activities, accomplishments, to-do lists and schedules will help with motivation.

Finally, identifying and dealing with productivity blockers by writing down all the tasks, goals, projects and worries that crowd your mind is the goal of the mind dump. The chapter concludes with advice on recognizing when quitting an activity, behaviour, or goal is the right move for productivity.

Hines expands upon the sources used throughout the book by providing a useful annotated resource guide in

Chapter 8. Chapter 9, “Wrapping Up”, ends the book with more personal insights and practical tips from the author.

While a quick and easy read, *Productivity for Librarians: How to Get More Done in Less Time* does not promise a simple fix to productivity and work–life balance. It reinforces the message that an honest desire for change and commitment to the process is the starting point for achieving productivity. The useful strategies and helpful reflective exercises will however put any librarian who spends time with this book on the path to productivity.

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