

TIME MANAGEMENT

Desk Stress



By GARY E. MOORE
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Somewhere, in every agriculture department, there is a teacher's desk. This desk can be the source of stress and lost time. In a recent issue of **American Demographics**, it was reported that during a lifetime an average person will spend eight months opening junk mail and another year looking for misplaced objects. My experience in agricultural education verifies this statement is true; we get tons of junk mail and we do lose items on our desks. In case you haven't seen your desk lately, it's the rectangular flat surface found under stacks of lesson plans, curriculum guides, notes, student papers, textbooks, slides, and FFA forms.

Those lost lesson plans, slides, exams, and FFA forms invite stress to creep into our lives. There are enough other things in life to get stressed about other than our desks. Can agriculture teachers learn to handle "desk stress"? Yes, here's how.

The Clean Desk/Sick Mind Rationalization

Most people can accomplish more if they keep the desk and office clean. If we have no room on our desks to spread our work out, we may not get it out. Also, items scattered all over the desk tend to catch our attention instead of the task at hand. And it is possible to misplace important items in all the clutter. The saying "a clean desk is the sign of a sick mind" is rationalization by people who aren't on top of things. Most highly efficient people operate from clean desks.

Operating From A Clean Desk

It is one thing to say we should operate from a clean desk, but it is another thing to actually operate from a clean desk. There are three major actions we can take to help us operate from a clean desk.

Use a desk drawer as an In Basket.

After we come back from the school office with our load of mail, we often toss it on the desk and then go teach class. After class we toss student paper on the other corner of the desk. In a few short hours the desk is covered. Just looking at the desk is too overwhelming — we don't know where to start. The first place to start is to clean out a desk drawer and use

it as an in-basket. Just drop the mail in the drawer and close the drawer. This reduces desktop clutter and prevents being distracted by items stacked on the desk. Consider using a second drawer for student papers. When it is time to read the mail or grade papers, pull out one or two items at a time. There should be a clean desktop on which to work.

Schedule time to handle paper work. We should regularly schedule time to handle paperwork. Paperwork doesn't get done by osmosis. It is time consuming and requires effort. Set aside time each day or week for paperwork. We schedule meetings and appointments with students, parents, and other teachers. It is okay to schedule an appointment with our desks.

Use the TRAF systems for handling paperwork. A systematic procedure, other than stacking stuff all over the desk, should be followed in handling paperwork. A procedure developed by Stephanie Winston called the TRAF system is a good model to follow. TRAF is an acronym for Toss, Refer, Act and File.

TOSS - Much of the mail that passes over our desks could be tossed without even opening it. Be selective in what is opened and even more selective in what is kept after being opened. For each piece of paper critically ask:

What is the worst thing that could happen if I threw this out?

If I needed this information later, where could I get it?

Would someone call me on it later?

Have a goal to toss (or recycle) as much paper as possible. Remember the adage, "If in doubt, throw it out." Let's not spend eight months of our lives opening junk mail.

REFER - As each piece of paper is handled, decide if someone else could respond to the request or supply the information. Jot a note in the corner asking a student worker, an FFA officer, or some other person to handle the item. We can delegate much more paperwork than we currently do.

ACT - If we don't toss the paper or refer it to someone else, then we must take some kind of action. A rule of thumb →

COMPUTER-ASSISTED TEACHING:

LANDCADD: Professionalizing Agricultural Graphic Applications in the Classroom



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The use of LANDCADD by horticulture and other agriculture teachers and students is on the rise in classrooms across the country. LANDCADD, along with AutoCAD, gives instructors and students creative tools, enabling them to produce quality designs from conception to final presentation.

One does not have to be a landscape architect or civil engineer to produce professional land use plans. Given basic computer skills, an understanding of menu driven or windows-supported software, and the ability to use AutoCADD, agriculture teachers and students are capable of using the LANDCADD system.

Applications in Agriculture

The program is excellent, as it prepares students for technical through management positions in numerous agricultural areas. Examples include nursery designer or manager, park and recreation resource planner, natural resources manager, educator, landscape architect, soil and water manager, land use planning specialist, agricultural engineer, irrigation and/or erosion specialist, and others who must demonstrate land use planning and design skills.

Every agricultural area of study has an opportunity to use this program to reinforce skills taught in the specific subject

areas. For example, agricultural engineering teachers might use the program to teach students how to design an erosion control structure. Horticulture teachers have endless opportunities to apply learning when teaching home, commercial, or interior landscaping; golf course design; and plant identification and selection.

A natural resources unit might include drawing a site plan for the park, while the soil and water management unit could include using the program to teach site analysis, how to interpret topographical maps, or contour and terrain modeling. Agricultural applications are not the only educational aspect of the program. Applied basic skills reinforce concepts learned in coordinate geometry, communications, and writing or text editing.

Systems Requirements

Careful consideration of school budgets makes this program more affordable than in the past. Approximately \$1,000 is needed for software. A new release, LANDCADD Light, will be available during the Fall of 1992 for about \$600. This less expensive version includes basic features of the standard version (listed at \$1,200) and is still a very comprehensive program for high school student use. The "light" version includes more symbols, more routines, and more pull down menus than →

is to go ahead and act on the item if it will take less than five minutes. Some teachers spend 30 minutes a week shuffling a paper all around the desk when it would have taken only five minutes to originally handle the item. Don't get into this habit. If the item requires more than five minutes, and time is available, go ahead and do it.

If the item requires more time than available, or requires additional information before a response can be made, use the A-B-C file system. Get three file folders, baskets or desk drawers and label them A, B and C. Items that are very important or urgent are placed in the A file. Less important or less urgent items are placed in the B file. The remainder go in

the C file. At the start of each day peruse the items in each file and place the items that need to be handled on a "to do" list, or schedule time for them. The worst sin in handling paper is to be indecisive. Don't let items float on the desk or stay in the in-basket. Make a decision.

FILE - For items that need to be filed, either file them, give them to the appropriate person to file, or have a special "To Be Filed" box where items can be placed.

Conclusion

Desk stress can be reduced by using a draw as an in-basket, scheduling time to do paperwork, and TRAFing all incoming papers during the day. We will be under less stress and so will our desks. ■