

Research Productivity in Music: A Personal Perspective

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Recent trends in higher education have changed many aspects affecting the role of the individual professor. Technological advancements, the increasing knowledge base, changes within our society, and the changing demographics of our constituents combined with changes concerning our fiscal support have had direct influences on the way that we go about our teaching, research and service. However, I suggest that each of us can continue through all of these ongoing transitions without compromising our personal integrity if we attend to time and personal time management.

It is apparent that heightened temporality awareness has come of age and that all aspects of our existence are now considered more in temporal terms whether they are scientific, religious, political, academic or philosophical. As we determine that the nature of time itself is not absolute but relative and that the very frontiers of time are being extended in creative ways, this knowledge should not provide a rationalization to justify lack of structure concerning that “real” time which measures our own existence. That is, we should not deal with epistemological boundaries in any manner that precludes an existential view of taking complete responsibility (at all times) for our actions. While time may indeed be relative and time itself may even be thought of as either past or future, it seems that both scientific and/or phenomenological investigation into the many aspects of time should not be used as rationalization to escape our responsibility or to deny our ability to structure ongoing processes through time.

Temporal aspects of life are indeed real. We do live on certain circadian schedules and rhythms. Many of our biological rhythms are extremely subtle, yet provide important influences on almost all aspects of behavior. Measured time proceeds from minute to minute, hour to hour, day to day, week, month, year, and so on. Our temporal life is relatively short and while some people conceptualize the shortness of this existence, it is often done in retrospect, that is, by taking two points outside of time while not really being aware of the distance between these two points in time. Such is the case when we meet one of our former students and realize that they are many years older now than they were then, and we think to ourselves, “Doesn’t time fly?” Time, of course, does not fly. Time is thought to progress quickly only if we are not aware of ongoing time.

A history concerning the transitions of time provides some interesting aspects concerning technological skill in measuring time. Historically it could be conjectured that people were happier when they were not aware of the subtleties of hours and minutes but only aware of days. However, it is a rather curious argument which maintains that the daily temporal span of the past somehow provided more happiness than does today’s when the only difference is our greatly increased ability to measure and thus be aware of smaller segments of time. An extended history of time also reveals that only recently have we begun to be aware of seconds and minutes. Phenomenologically we realize that for the most part we are still subjected to a daily life schedule and therefore, are generally only aware of morning, afternoon, and evening. While we do use hours to schedule classes or appointments, quite often this scheduling process becomes more of an episodic relationship in temporal awareness than a provision of measurement. When analyzing our present academic life style, it is necessary that we actually observe over a period of time (even if it is only for several days) our

use of time such that our actual use of time is not viewed in an ex post facto manner with only the high points becoming reality. If we do not have an ongoing log of our behavior, at least for a short period of time, it then becomes easy for us to engage in self-deception geared toward the exclusion of responsibility for doing anything in the here and now to structure new patterns toward greater productivity and/or happiness. In this regard external forces in our environment can always be blamed for our lack of productivity and/or happiness. Also, if one never attempts to acquire a foundation concerning what is operating in the present, then future programs can always be devised that do not take into account present contingencies. A specific log whereby we can record our use of time is both easy to construct and easy to use.

This time structure also necessitates examining our lives on the basis of a hierarchy of values. In this sense, we first determine what we value most, and then take data (log or diary) based upon what we are doing currently in order to better understand how to proceed. Structure is based upon our value orientation toward increasing/decreasing certain activities. Thus time can be the handmaiden of productivity as opposed to the sole determiner of our life style. It has been said many times that the difference between ordinary people and others who are truly productive does not take place over days, weeks, or months but over a period of years.

Perhaps the most important result of time structure is that it gives most of life’s control to the person who is doing it. There are two basic ways that people structure their time. One has to do with spending the amount of time necessary to accomplish a certain task; the other structure allots time to products, activities and people based on a priori values. Much in the same way that musicians practice their instruments, time is continuously allotted to the activity based on its overall importance and long-term benefits. If you ask a serious musician how much he/she practices, the person might say 2-4 hours daily. A musician would never say, “well, as much as I have to in order to get prepared for my next concert.” Increments of time are allotted, engaged in, and results ensue from the total time practiced. This manner of structuring time rations time increments in direct proportion to their importance. Thereby a professor would not think of allotting time in terms of “getting my project done” but in proportion to its importance. I will work for 2-3 hours a day on this book; it will be finished when it is finished. If a person’s family is important, this importance should also be expressed in time allotment.

It is in this regard that I would like to speak to the issue of personal integrity. I have served on the university promotion and tenure

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committee for over 40 years. I have served on the university grievance committee, the professional relations committee as well as many other committees that have consequential evaluative roles. It has been my experience that when good things do not happen to faculty, it is usually (but not always) because there has not been a priori structuring on the part of the faculty member. Without a prior structure, issues come up from time to time, that have not been previously thought through or a plan has not been developed for effectively dealing with foreseeable contingencies. When bad things do happen, the faculty member is hurt, sometimes tremendously hurt. The faculty member feels arbitrarily punished. It is at these times that the person begins to define the experience as one that would compromise her/his "integrity." Every person ought to have considered those issues that "one will go to the mat for" and these issues should be thought about before the fact, and not arise as a rationalization for lack of planning or lack of forethought. In this respect, if one allots a certain amount of time toward the pursuit of tenure and that time is insufficient, then so be it. I know that there are some situations that we cannot anticipate and thereby we are unable to construct a plan, yet I suggest that these are rare.

There are some that make a case against time structure for any number of reasons. Some state that "life is nothing but a variable series of experiences and one should be open to all of these many experiences toward increased happiness." Yet, if there are aspects in our lives that are pleasing and happy then we should pursue these aspects such that they can be nested within our ongoing temporal awareness. Thereby happiness by default becomes happiness by design, and random occurrences are relegated to a place in our lives where only "happy variations" are established as opposed to the temporal schedules that bring misery.

Sometimes people choose to structure "non-structure." That is, many people structure time when they can be alone without anything to do, or structure long periods of time where they can do anything they choose to do, as opposed to living life in an ipso facto capriciousness subjected only to the whims of external forces. In this regard, we may choose not to answer our telephone, or we may choose to seclude ourselves for two or three weeks to read a favorite book, or to ruminate about our next experiment, or to do nothing but contemplate our life style, or to contemplate nothing, or to 'watch a squirrel or perhaps merely to get away from it all.

This structure of non-structure, however, is not to be confused with our finding ourselves caught in an academic morass with having "too much to do and too little time to do it in" thereby justifying non-structure on the basis of our inability to control our environment. Through structuring, our temporal awareness is increased and we become more productive in our academic work. Perhaps as importantly, we also become more productive in our leisure. This does not happen by default; it happens by design.

As work is made into play by adding elements of creativity, we may also need to modify temporal schedules to get us through the difficult times. However, to accomplish this we must be careful not to subject ourselves only to aversive contingencies. Aversive contingencies at best will do nothing more than create the ability for us to endure misery for the sole purpose of having it end. Long-term aversive contingencies generally produce people who genuinely love to suffer.

As we consider work and leisure we must also consider process and product because both take place in time and are important to the establishment of effective and creative life styles. There are those who make a case for process, and those who make a case for product. It can easily be seen, however, that we need both process and product in some delicate balance in order to satisfy our need for ongoing temporal stability with a corresponding degree of variation and creativity. Product at the expense and the exclusion of a happy process will take the form of aversive control affecting gain.

The final goal toward modifying our time is to structure those aspects of life that are indeed creative toward long-term personal enjoyment and fulfillment. This is accomplished by first being aware of life's time and establishing the subtle relationships between phenomenological as opposed to measured time, by understanding temporal schedules in order to guard against those aspects that are temporally detrimental and finally, to modify life's schedules by structuring those aspects of life's activities that contribute to long-term productivity and happiness.

My specific suggestions are as follows

1. Construct a time log. Assess how you are spending your time and allot your future time based on your values. More importantly, learn to live within your temporal means.
2. Schedule some laboratory time or writing time every day on at least three days a week and stay with it. More importantly, learn to structure time such that you can become productive.
3. Schedule some aspect of a research or writing component into at least one of your classes skillfully nested within the course calendar. In this manner every time that you see that aspect on your syllabus or calendar it will remind you that you should be doing something of your own.
4. Use technology to meet your objectives; do not become a slave to your e-mail. iPhone calls, e-mail, and other correspondence do not all need to be answered. Even if you choose to answer, it should be on your timetable.
5. Schedule specific office hours, meet them and then do not be available to students at other times. Some instructors take great pride in "being available to students." Others use this "concern for students to substitute for long-term productivity. Our students do not need "hang time" with faculty. Additionally many students would rather get your class one-to-one in the privacy of your office than to attend class. Learn to deal with student problems efficiently.
6. Stop attending unnecessary meetings. Do not encourage them and do not ever call them. It has been said many times that administrators say yes to everything that they want to, and then appoint committees for everything else. Eschew meetings as often as possible. Besides, my personal data suggests that one can miss up to 50% of academic meetings without most people noticing your absence.
7. Stop unnecessary visiting with colleagues. Occasionally get on-task to them one-on-one over coffee and/or an occasional lunch. Get really on task to them, then meet and greet at the mailbox for 1-2 minutes only.