

1 | Way Too Much to Do

Sometimes I just feel overwhelmed. I have practice after school. By the time I get home, it's 6:30. After dinner, homework is piled up. With other commitments – clubs, volunteering, work (not to mention friends and sleep) – I feel so much pressure. How do I manage this too-full schedule?

My friend, Leo Linbeck III, once told me, "There are no easy jobs with big impact. If you want a stress-free life, recognize you probably won't have much impact."

This is an important insight for Triple-Impact Competitors who want to have a positive impact in the world. Growing involves learning to deal with increased responsibility. As runners or swimmers learn to lower their times by training beyond the point of discomfort, we also learn to handle more as we get outside our comfort zone.

It's also true we may try to do so much we don't do justice to the big things. Too many small things can cloud our vision and overwhelm and discourage us. The key is to decide on your Big Picture and keep focused on it.

Use the "5-Year Rule" to identify your Big Picture. Many of the things we worry about today we won't even remember in five years, but some will be very important. Project five years into the future and look back:

"When I was in high school, I'm glad I _____."

Try to limit yourself to no more than 5 things, and don't worry if you don't get them exactly right at first. You can refine this over time.

Keep two lists. A to-do list with the important things you need to do is useful. Just as important is what business expert Jim Collins calls a "Don't-Do List" – the things you won't do to free up time for the important things.

Some things are required – like school. But you don't have to do everything everyone wants. You can decide not to do something. You may have to make some hard decisions and let others know you can't do what they want you to.

A friend's son made the jazz band in his school and decided he couldn't do justice to both lacrosse and jazz band, so he chose to drop lacrosse. He explained his decision to his parents and told his coach he was quitting to focus on music. It may have been hard for him to do this, but he did it. And so can you if you feel too stretched. Look at all your activities, and pick out those that are important to you. Talk with your parents about which ones you want to focus on and which to drop.

Note that some parents live vicariously through the success of their kids. If your parents are like this, you may have to convince them that you will be happier and more successful if you focus on fewer things and do them well. Everyone – including family, coaches, teachers, and friends – is ultimately responsible for his or her own feelings and actions, just as you are responsible for yours. If you are a "people pleaser" who gets uncomfortable when others get upset with you, you may need to learn to live with a little discomfort while you stay true to your own decisions about sports and life.

Schedule time to plan. It may be a cliché, but it is true: "Failing to plan is planning to fail." Set aside 15 minutes each week to get organized (perhaps on Sunday evening). Get Big Picture items on the calendar and allocate enough time to them. Use the Goal-Setting exercise on page 14 for your important goals.

Be better than perfect. Perfectionism is a prescription for failure and unhappiness. If we feel we have to be perfect, we typically won't start work on a project until it is breathing down our neck. Break free of perfectionism and you will have a much happier and more successful life.

As a teenager I worked in the North Dakota sugar beet fields. One day the foreman told me I was doing "too good" a job. He noticed I worked slower than others because I was determined to get every last weed. He explained that beets could grow fine with a few weeds here and there. I was trying to be perfect with something that didn't require perfection.

As my friend Greg Tehven told me, "Perfect is good. Done is better." Many things don't need to be perfect – they just need to get done. If you try to be perfect where you don't have to, you steal time from things that do need to be

done well, such as college application essays. Identify things that just need to be done and get them out of the way.

Get a head start. An early start on a big project is liberating, so don't wait until crunch time. Log time early on what Anne LaMott in *Bird by Bird* calls "crummy first drafts." Completing a draft, even a bad one, plants a stake in the ground. Crummy first drafts lead to not-so-bad second drafts, good third drafts, and so on. An early start creates momentum that may be the difference between a so-so effort and a really good one.

Eat, sleep, appreciate. Food and sleep are fuel for humans. Eat healthy – munch on apples or carrots rather than junk food. See Exercise 3 on page 21 for more on eating right.

Fatigue makes everything harder, so get enough sleep – research shows teens need 9.25 hours a night. Sneak in a nap when you can.

Life goes by quickly so make time to appreciate the daily joys of life. Make a date with yourself to do something that invigorates you – including unstructured downtime – and put it on the calendar. Being on the calendar makes it seem important, and this is. When doing something to invigorate yourself, don't let your mind wander to all the things you have to do. They'll still be there when you return to them with fresh energy.



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