

The SOLUTION source

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Newsletter
By Colleen Ginter, Clinical Counsellor at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre

For You & Your Family

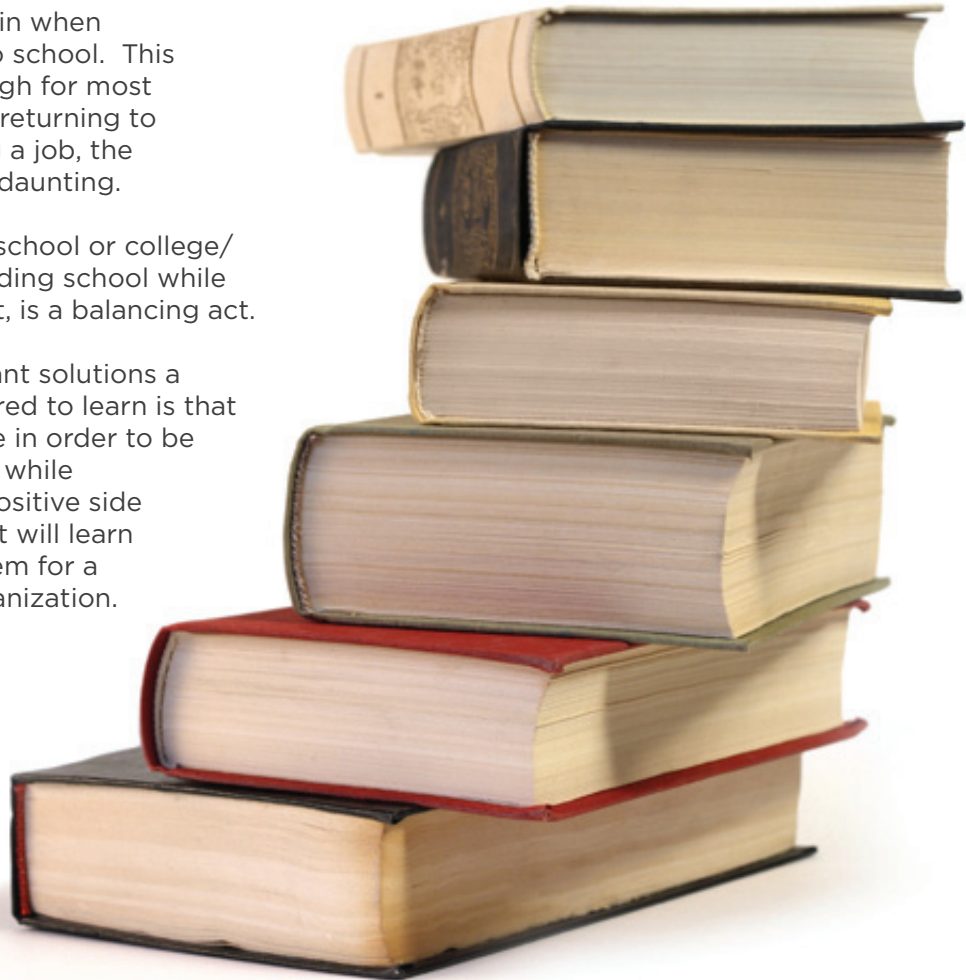
Fall 2011

Back to School & Work – HELP!!!

It's that time of year again when students are returning to school. This can be challenging enough for most people, but when one is returning to school while maintaining a job, the challenge is much more daunting.

Whether you are a high school or college/university student, attending school while maintaining employment, is a balancing act.

One of the most important solutions a working student is required to learn is that of developing a schedule in order to be able to manage working while attending school. The positive side to this is that the student will learn skills that will benefit them for a lifetime. The skill of organization.



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Helpful Suggestions

Ask why, not how

"I don't ever stop to ask myself how, I just remind myself why." It was once said that if you have a big enough "WHY" you can overcome any "HOW". Have a burning hot reason of why you have to endure this short-term pain to achieve long-term gain and I promise you, you'll figure out "how" to do it.

Get your priorities straight

All tasks are not created equal, so you can't afford to treat them as such if you are a "working" college student. To use Stephen Covey's words, "You must put first things first". You've heard the old saying that you can't have your cake and eat it too. Unfortunately, this is true if you're a working student. Let's face it, there are some fun things you're just going to have to give up doing for a while, at least until you're in a better financial situation.

Remember that school is more important than work (for now).

Regardless of how many jobs you have to work to pay for your education and living expenses, never forget "why" you're working. Some students I know seem to get so involved in their job(s) that they allow their grades to suffer, which in turn extends their time in college (big mistake).

Leverage your time by working smarter not harder

Find ways you can steal study time, whether it be on your job or anywhere else. Tape your class lectures and listen to them in the car (boring, yes, but effective). Write your notes on small index cards and take them wherever you go. Treat them like an American Express card; don't leave home without them.

Study in small intervals instead of big time blocks. Read your note cards while you're standing in line, waiting for an appointment, during breaks between class, in the car when you're stuck in traffic, when you're sitting down eating in the student union, in the bathroom when you're taking care of your personal business (hey, you have to be creative) and whatever else you can think of.

Avoid strenuous physical jobs whenever possible

School is already tough and working doesn't make it any easier. But take comfort in the fact that statistics show that students who work AND go to school have, on the average, higher GPAs than their fellow classmates who don't. I know it may seem impossible when you try to earn while you learn. (Real World University) ■



Your Brain at Work and School

The Perils of Overdoing It

According to author David Rock, “a study done at the University of London found that constant e-mailing and text-messaging reduces mental capacity by an average of ten points on an IQ test. It was five points for women and fifteen points for men. This effect is similar to missing a night’s sleep. “Always on” may not be the most productive way to work. When the brain is being “forced” to be on alert far too much, this increases what is known as your allosteric load, which is a reading of stress hormones. This always on, anywhere, anyplace era has created an artificial sense of constant crisis. What happens to mammals in a state of constant crisis is the adrenalized fight-or-flight mechanism kicks in. The cost on the brain can be significant. ■



Some Things to Think About

Author of *Your Brain at Work*, David Rock, invites us to be mindful of the following information about our brain:

- You can focus on only one conscious task at a time
- Switching between tasks uses energy; if you do this a lot you can make more mistakes
- If you do multiple conscious tasks at once you will experience a big drop-off in accuracy or performance
- The only way to do two mental tasks quickly, if accuracy is important, is doing them one at a time

More Suggestions

1. Do the most complex work when you have the most energy.

Don't do routine work such as reading old email in the morning. The brain finds it harder to think about solutions (which happen in the future and haven't happened), as opposed to problems (which you've already experienced), so focus on solutions and to-dos when you are fresh. Writing down your priorities literally releases more energy for your brain to think!

2. Break down complex tasks into simpler ones.

Because the prefrontal cortex works best on one or two ideas at a time, simplify the information you're working on by breaking it down into lists and chunks. Separate harder ideas and learn them independently.

3. If you have to multitask, combine active thinking with automatic, embedded routine or transactional routines.

That's why I can iron a shirt or empty the dishwasher during a conference call and still perform relatively well; or, another manager can sign contracts while she's thinking about her next sales meeting. Become aware of your mental energy needs and schedule accordingly.

Some Things to Try

- Catch yourself trying to do two things at once and slow down instead
- If you have to multitask, combine active thinking tasks only with automatic, embedded routines. (Embedding is a metaphor for creating circuits in a part of our brain that can drive behaviours without thinking. In other words it is an activity that we have done so often that we do it without having to think about it. Things like brushing our teeth, putting our shoes on or locking the door as we leave).

4. Ruthlessly screen out distractions, such as social media.

People are wired to be easily distracted. Over millions of years, our brains have learned to notice and respond to changes in environment as protection from danger. Today, we don't have to worry about getting jumped by a predator, but our brain is still on alert and that makes us prone to following our impulses. Nothing is more draining to your prefrontal cortex than drinking from the “fire hose” of daily information overload. So learn to switch off your devices, limit social media to certain periods of the day and clear your mind before taking on complex tasks.

5. Avoid emotionally charged issues when you're doing critical work.

If listening to politics or certain music that stir up your emotions you'll have fewer resources for the work at hand. On the other hand, if you're tired or experiencing writer's block, a small dose of stress can bring up your dopamine level just enough to energize you. (*Your Brain at Work*, by David Rock) ■

Spending the Candle from Both Ends (a Credit Counsellor's Perspective)

Going back to school while working, has its obvious costs of tuition, books, parking, supplies and your time. So how can you prepare financially for this endeavour? The key to success is being organized and prioritizing. Same goes for your finances.

First, know the actual financial costs of furthering your education. Make an itemized list with realistic approximate costs for each item.

For example:

Tuition.....\$6,000
Books.....\$1,000
Study Snacks.....\$450

Second, know how you will pay for these costs. Will it be government loan, employer tuition assistance, registered education savings plan, funds previously saved, a bank loan or line of credit, or an RRSP withdrawal?

Third, get financially organized now. By simplifying how you manage your regular daily finances now, you will be saving time and brain energy needed for school and work and perhaps, even save some money!

With a little effort now, you can save time, energy and money:

- Set-up automatic payment of bills or online banking
- Review your bank fees and simplify your banking and debts into one place
- Schedule a weekly time to attend to your finances, pay bills and keep organized
- Put the interact card and credit cards away, use cash. Card funds are too tempting under the stress of balancing work and school
- Set up envelopes with cash for food, transportation, entertainment, snacks
- Organize your financial documents organized with everything in one place
- Set up a filing system for all receipts and incomes for tax season now
- Keep receipts from tuition, books, mandatory fees, admission fees etc. for income taxes
- Create a plan of all income and all expenses for each month you are in school
- List your priority, monthly expenses chronologically with approximate amounts
- Include an amount for healthy study snacks in your budget and buy in bulk
- Include a realistic amount for fun to release stress once in a while
- Keep your student ID in your wallet and use as much as possible for discounts

You will have skills that benefit you even when things settle down.

(Bev Dunnill - Credit Counsellor with Thunder Bay Counselling Centre) ■



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Please contact the Counselling Centre at 705 848-2585 if you are interested in participating in any of the following groups:

Women for Change is a 10 week group providing support, education and counselling to women who live or have lived in an abusive relationship. The group offers a safe place for women to encourage, support and empower each other.

Creating Connections is a group for children who have been exposed to domestic violence. This group brings together children and their mothers after school hours and runs for ten weeks. Mothers and children meet in the same building but have their own group meetings.

Caregiver Support is a four week group for those Caregiving for a loved one in or out of their home (parent, child, spouse, friend) who are looking for contact with other caregivers and to develop the coping skills necessary to be successful in their role while attending to their own mental/physical health.

Anger Solutions is a 10-week group focused on helping people respond to frustration signals in ways that contribute to healthier outcomes. The group includes a large focus on communication and assertiveness skills.

Women of Courage is a 20 week group for female survivors of sexual abuse/assault. This group provides coping skills and also explores relationship issues while assisting members to deal with day to day symptoms of their abuse/assault.



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