Project Management
Lessons Learned
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- In my old job – a simple handwritten to do list with anywhere from 6 – 25 items at any given time typically worked and I felt like I was able to get everything done in a high quality and timely manner.

- As a new 4-H Extension Educator – I quickly realized that the volume of tasks and things that need to get done on a regular basis is extraordinarily high and that falling behind was no fun. In fact during my first two years on the job – keeping up with the volume of work while also learning my job – felt a lot like drinking from a fire hose. I began numbering my handwritten sloppy to do lists at the beginning of the month and quickly realized over a few months that on average I have about 100 – 150 tasks per month that need to get done to keep all of my programs and “projects” running smoothly. Handwritten, disorganized, and hard to read lists were causing me serious stress. I needed to find a better solution that could allow me to track from month to month and year to year what my tasks were and what progress was being made toward successfully implementing programs and executing events and activities.

- Planning may seem like a waste of time and that you’re not being as productive as just attacking items on your to-do list or in your in-box, but taking the time to properly plan when and in what order you will do things can save tremendous amounts of time in the long-run. It can lead to a more even work-flow throughout the year and less “crunch times.” It can also allow you to better utilize support staff, volunteers, and others that can help lighten the work load. What’s the old saying?? – Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance!

- I tried lots of different apps and software programs looking for the one that could best manage my crazy long list of things to get done – in the end I found it easier to create my own unique Microsoft Excel file customized to me rather than continuing to fight with software and apps to get them to do what I visualized in my head that I needed to stay organized and efficiently get work done. I continue to make minor tweaks to my Excel Project Management spreadsheet – but overall I really like it and feel that when I’m working in it, I’m now able to focus on getting things done instead of being frustrated by what previous software or apps couldn’t do for me. I keep this document open and available to me on a second monitor at all times when I’m in the office. For access out of the office I have it synched up to my phone, tablets, and home computers through Buckeye Box Synch – this way I can access and update it from anywhere.

- Some people go over board with color coding – I keep it simple. Completed tasks are highlighted green and given a check mark next to them along with changing the text to “strikethrough.” Tasks not completed by the end of the month are highlighted red and receive an arrow to forward them to the next month if appropriate. I have a tab at the bottom of the Excel workbook for each month.