

Time Management in Civil Services-3

In the previous article, I told you about my own preparation for civil services in the form of a story. Now, I will highlight a few things that you can implement in your own schedule for a good result.

1) It is definitely true that the best time to study is in the morning. It is serene, the mind and body is refreshed and the brain is also thinking clearly. This also has scientific support, but I don't want to elaborate on that here. But I do want to mention that if you study for an hour and a half in the morning you will feel good all day. You will feel good thinking that you have finished one of the most important things. Otherwise, you will feel a certain anxiety, worry and pressure all the time. When you feel this way, it affects your work adversely. This means that the quality of work may decline. Your tasks will also take more time to complete. This means we are letting time slide through our fingers. If you do not believe me, try this out for 2 to 4 days. If you like it you can continue, else you don't have to.

2) I had a problem studying at night. I still cannot do so. To study after I have had dinner is nothing less than scaling Mt Everest for me. During my preparation I would sleep early. Waking up early is, of course, linked to the time you go to sleep. You can speak for yourself that you are unable to sleep early. There may be many reasons behind it. These reasons can be valid. But if you keep using valid reasoning to explain all your decisions then there will be a time when you would have to explain your failure also with valid reasons. In the end, you need to take out time. It will also take some time for you to break the chain of going to bed late and then waking up late. If you are able to achieve this, it would be an ideal situation. If you are unable to do this, do not despair. You can find another way. I'm only sharing my experience here.

3) Another thing that you can learn from what I mentioned above is how we can use time that is usually wasted. In metro cities, students spend a lot of time commuting, unless they are driving. I believe students can use travel time to study. I have done so. Do not worry about how you can study in all that noise. Most students think studying for civil services is akin to meditation. This is a myth and you should avoid thinking this way. And even if you continue to think of it as meditation, you should know that one can meditate even amidst heavy traffic. This is actual meditation. To meditate in a cave in the isolation of Himalayas is perhaps the easiest thing to do. If you enjoy studying, nothing can stop you from doing so, not even adverse circumstances. So you can definitely do this but you can try to pick up light stuff to study during these intervals. If you are determined to crack civil services, you will be able to achieve this. I'm not preaching here but telling you the truth. Anyone who has achieved anything has done it the hard way.

4) You can study when you get time during work. I don't think there is a job that is so busy that it requires you to work all the time. Though most people claim that their job is like that. I have already explained my experiences in college regarding this. You may find it hard to believe that the three most research papers by Einstein, which established him as a scientist, were written when he was working with the meteorological department. Whenever he found a little time he would get to working. You may be faced with an ethical dilemma here and some people may use it to avoid the stress of utilising free time. They might ask, "Should we use the time in office for personal work?" The logical answer is "no". However, there is a practical answer too. If you do not have any work at any point of time, how are you using that time? You are simply wasting it. It is important that you do not do your personal work at the cost of office tasks. Office work should be your priority. But if you are using time that would otherwise be wasted, it is not a crime. Now it is for you to decide.

5) No matter what kind of a job we do, we are entitled to some days of leave. There are 54 Sundays in a year. If you work five days a week then you can add 54 more days to this. There are around 10 to 15 days you will be

off from work due to various festivals. You have 10 to 15 days of earned leave as well. You may have other leaves too. Have you ever thought of using these holidays?

These holidays are like a free hit in cricket where you can use all your might to hit a six. These holidays are a boon for you and you can utilise the time in your own way during these days. You can take your studies from average to improved by using these holidays to the maximum. Take them as a precious gift and use them fully. I know that you may have many arguments in mind regarding my statement. You may want to say that you have to finish other tasks during holidays. Or that you just get a single day to rest and that brain needs a day of rest. I'm not disagreeing with you. They are all true. But my question here is: What should be your priority? If you have set upon achieving something great then shouldn't your thought process be great too? If you keep thinking like everyone else does, then you would remain like them. For you, the holidays should be an opportunity to work harder than normal. When it comes to relaxing and de-stressing, I think the night is enough for that. If you feel you need more time to relax, you should realise that you aren't approaching this with an iron-clad will.

6) In whichever company you work for, you have the option of taking a few days off, even if it is unpaid leave. I understand that it might not be easy to take unpaid leave keeping financial hurdles in mind. But in most cases, I have felt that this is a psychological barrier and not so much a financial one. People think that taking unpaid leave will result in financial loss. But if you need the off, why worry about the loss? To tell you the truth if you use your time effectively, you will not need to take that many days off work. You will, however, require leave during the time of exam.

I would like to talk about the time when I was studying for my graduation as a private student. I had this rule. A month before exam I would leave all other work or delegate it to my younger brother. I would only prepare for the exam in this month. It was a very productive month for me. I could work on all my weak points. I continued this until I completed college. You can also try this method.

I would also like to talk to you about this principle that to achieve something big one has to give up many small things. We cannot have our cake and eat it too. So in case you need to take a few days off to focus on your studies you should do so.

7) If we were to evaluate our daily schedule we would find that only half of the time has been fully utilized. It is important to note that half of that time is spent in tasks that are of no importance or are not more important than preparing for civil services. An important aspect of time management is to prioritise your work. You should make a list and jot down all the things you do on a given day. Then remove the things you don't need to do right now. Do not think that you have to do all the things that you have been doing.

You should try this. We find it difficult to give up many things because they are a part of our habit. We need to change things and this is the right time to do so. You can also try this, leave those things for others to do which you know they can do. You have many people who will come to help you. It is for you to decide how you can take their help to save time. Even if you have to spend some money to get their help you should do it. Do not try to save money, money exists only to boost your power and your capabilities. You have your entire life to save money. Here you should consider it just as a medium to achieve success. As far as I think your priority right now should be two things- first is financial stability, it could be your business or your job. The second thing is preparing for civil services. It is best that for sometime you bid adieu to all the other works that may be creating a hurdle in achieving this goal. Do not worry. You will not lose anything because of this. Once you succeed you will get all the things that you have had to give up right now, and in greater quantities. Even if you were to lose these things, if you are unsuccessful, you should believe that they were never yours. So cut down your list of necessary things to only two tasks.

8) If you do not take what I say in jest, I would like to tell you that any great accomplishment requires realisation. Preparing for civil services is an important task. This is by you will have to work on this realisation. This means you will have to eliminate all too small desires that lead you to waste the wealth of your time and in the end you will be left with nothing but regrets. You should adopt a simple and austere life. I am not asking you to renounce everything and become a saint. I am not even talking about 'simple living, high thinking'. What I mean to say here is that a simple life keeps us away from difficulties that result in wastage of time. We first give rise to these difficulties and then spent time solving them. The irony is that instead of getting solved these problems are further compounded. This is how we get trapped because we need time to do these things. If you live a simple life you will be able to save more time.

9) Many of my young friends often ask me: How many hours should one sleep? The simple answer is that you should sleep for as many hours as you think necessary. Or till the time you feel fresh after you have woken up and are not constantly yawning. But here is the question: If you achieve this stage only after sleeping for eight hours, does it mean that you are allowed to sleep for eight hours, especially when you are preparing for civil services? No. Not at all. If you allow me I would like to call this a sort of crime. Even otherwise you should not sleep for eight hours. The optimal sleep time is a minimum of six hours and a maximum of 7 hours. According to science, six hours of sleep are sufficient to recharge your body. There is another thing, if you are busy during the day then your mind and body will be so tired that the minute you hit the bed, you will fall asleep. You will be in such deep sleep that once you are up after six hours you would have slept well. If even after all this you are sleepy, you can assume that this is psychological and not a need of your body. You are in the habit of sleeping for long hours and that is why you think that you should sleep a little more. And when you sleep for a "little" while longer it turns into a long time. I think you should not let your brain trick you, at least not till you are preparing for civil services.

10) I feel that any man, who has some important objectives and believes in the concept of saving time, should have a timetable. I followed this. I do this till today. I did not have a written schedule, I do not have it now, but my mind has it all planned. The time that I wake up in the morning is certain. My activities for the day are planned out and I know when to do what. You might find it peculiar but if I wake up in the morning not knowing what to do, or if I know that there is nothing to do today, I feel restless. How will I spend the day today! This is the thought that occurs to me. I'm not a workaholic but I want that I should be engaged in something throughout the day. I don't understand how to sit idle. I may study, or write, or just think, but I have to do something.

I'm talking about time management in the context of civil services. This is for the section that is preparing for civil services and has a problem managing time. Therefore, it is important for these aspirants to have an outline of their daily activity and follow it with complete discipline. You should keep intervals throughout the day so that if task A takes too much time then the interval will compensate for it. So your timetable should be practical. It shouldn't be so rigid that that you are unable to follow it, you get stressed and anxious, or you stick to it for a while but give it up in the long run. Your timetable should be such that you adhere to it and have self-satisfaction.

11) It is believed that an average person can work for 8 to 10 hours a day. This is fine when it comes to long-term preparation. But I also think that if required a person can work for up to 15 hours a day. You must also do this. If this holds true for you then you can use this for effective time management. If you can work for up to 15 hours a day for four to five days then can't you increase the frequency of these days? Can't you do this for a month, six months or a year? If one can do this for a few days, I'm sure they can do this for longer.

I believe in this principle of nature that something which has occurred once can occur twice and maybe even many times. You can work on it like this. On an average you work for 10 hours every day. In a month you

should shortlist a few days in which you will work for 13 hours. You can keep gaps in between these days. If in a month you keep seven days in which you work for 13 hours you will find that in a month you have earned 20 to 25 hours extra and they will contribute a lot.

12) We are all humans and we have many weaknesses. These could include physical weaknesses, mental weaknesses, and some may be habitual. Some weaknesses are born due to our desires. Some are born due to our age. The time right now is not to let these weaknesses overtake you. The time is also not right to get over these weaknesses. The time right now is to convert these weaknesses into your strengths. You will have to be strong. You will have to be ruthless and evaluate yourself. You will have to examine each one of your weaknesses properly and then figure out ways to get rid of them. You will have to use those methods to get rid of your weaknesses. This will result in two immediate benefits. The first is that you will become very strong mentally and this is an integral part of your personality. This will be needed in the last leg of civil services. You cannot fulfil this need by training for a month or 15 days. The second benefit that you will get is that you will save time. We waste our time not just by working but also by thinking unnecessary things. You will notice that the thoughts that entered your mind to weaken you, make you anxious, scare you, tempt you have now gradually ended. Since now your mind is free of these thoughts you will feel different. It may be the first time that you will think time can be like this. This will be the time which will be most precious, most productive, and most effective. This happens because the time you have now is directly linked to your mental state. So what ever you do right now, it will be done in a better way and will take less time. I had told you to complete your important tasks in the morning, I am saying the same thing here albeit in a different way.

NOTE: This article by Dr. Vijay Agrawal was first published in 'Civil Services Chronicle'.

The logo for AFEIAS features a stylized blue and green graphic of an open book with a checkmark above it, positioned above the word "AFEIAS" in large, bold, sans-serif letters. The letters are colored in a gradient: 'A' is blue, 'F' is light blue, 'E' is yellow, 'I' is light green, 'A' is yellow, and 'S' is light green.