Doing the Work of Two When You Are Only One

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23 years in higher education
13 years working with student veterans
9 years of veterans services oversight

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Air Traffic Controller
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Organization/Prioritization
Single Tasking
Active Listening/Kindness
Delegation
Standardization
Patience
Self-Care
Organize. Organize. Organize.

Have a prioritized to-do list. I use written list with A/B priorities.
Organize, Prioritize

Longer term items I put as appointments on calendar.

Treat emails/phone as walk-ins, answer/look at right away. *Prioritize* immediately.

Be prepared to re-prioritize. A new email or phone call may change the relative urgency of your tasks.
“Hoping for efficiency by combining two pure productivity tasks — say, composing a letter while following a presentation — is folly. That’s all cognitive cost and no emotional benefit.” – Daniel Willingham

“A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. The ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost.” - Matthew A. Killingsworth and Daniel T. Gilbert
“Men have become the tools of their tools.”
— Henry David Thoreau
“Catch yourself the next time you find yourself thinking in terms of quantity. Simply notice the feeling of urgency and the tendency to rush through them. Notice, also, the inclination to shrink back. Although they seem like opposite tendencies, both come from the same feeling of aversion, and serve only to keep us out of touch with the actual task. We’re taken aback by the enormity of what we’ve created in our minds, so we say, ‘I’m just going to plow through it and get it done, or, It’s too overwhelming and I don’t know where to start.’ Both responses pull us out of the freshness of direct experience. They both bind us to the fantasy of a task rather than the reality of it, warping our sense of what is really required. A task is done in steps, because reality is made up of steps, infinitely divided flashes of time that are too small to measure. We come to life and our energy soars when we join that moment, rather than standing separate from it—when we rise to the occasion rather than sink into the pit of resistance. When we join the moment, we join time. We are time.” - Donna Quesada
From *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert Pirsig

“...I’ve a set of instructions ... which open up great realms for the improvement of technical writing. They begin, ‘Assembly of Japanese bicycle require great peace of mind.’”

“That’s a good instruction”...

“At first I laughed because of memories of bicycles I’d put together and, of course, the unintended slur on Japanese manufacture. But there’s a lot of wisdom in that statement”. “Peace of mind isn’t all superficial, really,” I expound. “It’s the whole thing. That which produces it is good maintenance; that which disturbs it is poor maintenance. What we call workability of the machine is just an objectification of this peace of mind. The ultimate test’s always your own serenity. If you don’t have this when you start and maintain it while you’re working you’re likely to build your personal problems right into the machine itself.”
When starting a project, task or a test, think of nothing else.

Concentrate only on the task at hand in a calm and relaxed manner. Don’t think about what you will be doing or must do after this task.

My personal experience has proven that I will accomplish the task more quickly, with fewer problems than if I rush through thinking about all the other things I have to do.

Embrace interruptions as an integral part of your job instead of a distraction from your job.
Calm Single Tasking

“Talking to you is the most important thing in the world I should be doing now!”
– Fred Rogers

The complete concentration on a student facilitates active listening, reflection and a proposed course of action.
Take your time. Don’t react. Hear everything. Ask for clarification. Read and re-read everything. Your goal is to be accurate and thorough even at the expense of prompt.

Draft replies. Never type a reply and hit send before re-reading message and your reply. Re-read before sending.

*Always* take the time to add kindness.
Military communication is efficient, concise and unemotional. That is *not* what is needed now.

Be professional but be personal. Share a story. Let the person “see” you.

People in general and veteran students in particular are hungry for kindness. Before hitting “send” always check for kindness.

*Never* respond when you are upset or angry! (Especially when you have every right to be!)

In-person conversations are usually more effective (and ultimately more efficient) than email!
This is a management guideline that I have used for years. Sometimes (most times) it saves you time. Sometimes it does not.

When you let the people who are trained to do a job, do the job, it saves you time.

When you teach someone, student or co-worker, to do a job they should be doing, it will likely take you more time. In the long run though, it will be better for everyone, especially you.
Especially true when you can delegate that job to the student veteran. Direct, don’t do.

“My job is not to help veterans. My job is to help veterans help themselves.”

“When you are working harder than the client, something is wrong.”

“Now that you have led him to water, why are you holding his head under?”
Never Do What You Can Delegate

Use available resources (other schools?) to mimic successful programs.

Once you have created something that you know you will use again, save it so you can selectively copy and paste later. Just be sure you don’t mix up the names! (Standardize and Duplicate)
Standardize and Duplicate “Getting Started” sample

The Top Seven Ways to Throw Away Your Money!

1. **No-Show** – Sign up for a class and then don’t participate. The VA will not pay anything* for any class with a “non-punitive” grade. A “non-punitive” is one that does not affect your GPA calculation. The student is responsible for 50% of the cost of the class. The student is responsible to repay the VA for any payments made in connection with this class.

2. **Withdraw** – The VA will not pay anything* for any class with a “non-punitive” grade. The student is responsible for 100% of the cost of the class. The student is responsible to repay the VA for any payments (such as BAH or other stipend) made in connection with this class.

3. **Stop attending classes** - This will likely result in a “Stop Out”. The VA will not pay for any portion of classes that a veteran student stops attending. So, even though you will receive a grade of “F,” you will be responsible for the portion of class you stopped attending from the date of you stopped attending. Moreover, you will not receive any BAH payments made after the “stop out” date.

4. **Don’t report Attendance** - New regulations require that students using any form of GI Bill® verify their attendance with the VA every month. After the last day of an active semester month call the Education Call Center at 888 442 4551 to report attendance.

5. **Keep your status a secret** - Your benefit status is never shared directly between the VA, the National Guard or any other agency and the college. If you don’t tell us what you want to do with your benefits, we won’t know and won’t be able to help you. The student is responsible for 100% of the cost of the classes.

6. **Sign up for classes that do not apply to your program** - All forms of GI Bill® benefits require that all classes must apply to the degree/certificate program in which you are enrolled.

7. **Don’t fill out a Mass Veteran Tuition Waiver** if you are a Mass veteran - We cannot bill the VA (or the Mass Guard) for tuition that should be waived. This tuition will remain on the student’s bill and therefore be the student’s responsibility.

* Anything means the cost of the course and any BAH or stipend associated with that course or courses.
Post Documents That Can be Read
Only computers with Microsoft Office installed can read
Word or Excel documents.
Just about anything can read a PDF.
Be visual.

Your instructions should include photos, diagrams.

Any way to make it easier for the student to see what you mean.
Be Patient

Be patient with your veterans. This is mostly new to them. They came from a culture of being told what to do many, many times. (Training vs. Education)

Be patient with your co-workers. They likely aren’t as good at their jobs as you are at yours. There is no sense in getting angry. Try to be helpful and persuasive in assisting that individual to do what you need them to do. You still need their cooperation.

Be patient with yourself. You are really good at what you do, but you cannot and should not do everything. (See Move On.)
Sometimes there is nothing you can do to help a student. If you did everything you could, accept that and move on.
This was a *really* hard job before COVID. It’s even harder now.

Meditation (VA 5 minute grounding)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4oqk5spCXY

Stop and Breathe

Walks (sunshine)

Move the sign!
Take Care of Yourself

Be available by phone, zoom or email **during** the hours you would normally be available. I don’t think 24/7 is a good idea. You are sending wrong message.

Don’t peek at your business emails on the phone! Okay sometimes we all do, but, if you do, go ahead and take care of whatever quick issues you can. Write the other ones on your to-do list so you don’t forget. Then, forget about them!
You have (and should have) a life outside of work. Live it!

Utilize automated, out of office messages.

Take care of yourself. You will be of greater value to everyone if you do.
Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance – ©1974 Robert Pirsig

The High Price of Multitasking - Daniel T. Willingham, NY Times, July 14, 2019

A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind, Matthew A. Killingsworth and Daniel T. Gilbert, Science, November 12, 2010

The Buddha in the Classroom: Zen Wisdom to Inspire Teachers, ©2011 Donna Quesada