

George Mason University

Ask Becca

Advice Column

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Art Taylor

Q: *Dear Becca,*

I have a full-time job delivering pizzas, and I am studying nursing full-time at West Virginia University. My schedule is very hectic and demanding. I barely have time for homework. I work Monday-Friday from 9am-5pm, and I attend 4 night classes during the week on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, from 7:20pm-10:00pm. I have been wanting to get a part-time job at a doctor's office so that I can gain some experience before graduation in 2 years. How do you think I can fit a new part-time job into my schedule? I don't want "Joe's Pizza" to be the only thing on my resume. Please help!

Sincerely, SHANELL

A: Dear Shannell,

With everything you've just told me, I'm surprised that you've found time to write me, let alone do everything else you're doing.

It seems that you don't need help deciding how to manage your time so much as deciding what exactly you want to be doing with your time in the larger scheme of things. While nursing school and a full-time job are very wonderful aspirations to have, doing both at the same time will probably lead you to burn out quickly. I can't imagine working 40 hours a week while also going to school full-time.... for a nursing degree. While both may be necessary to your immediate survival, I think you should probably reevaluate how to lessen your load rather than add to it.

While I understand the desire to graduate from school as soon as possible, I think that working full-time, going to such an intense schooling program, and trying to add another job is unreasonable. So, there are a few options for you.

1. Carry on with the pizza job. What's wrong with Joe's Pizza? You say you don't want it to be the only thing on your resume, well why is that? Many companies value commitment to one job because it shows that you can persevere through less than ideal situations. Working at a doctor's office does not necessarily enhance your marketability to a nursing facility, so I think it's completely reasonable and even respectable to show that you have worked well at one institution for an extended period of time. Leaving a good, steady job that affords you the ability to go to school and to continue to live while doing so can be a good change in certain situations — however, I think that you also need to evaluate what makes a job worthwhile to you.
2. Stop working at Joe's pizza and work part-time at a doctor's office. I would not recommend adding more to your schedule, so if you decide that working at a doctor's office is that important to you, then you need to cut something else out. If your budget allows it, then move to working part-time. It would be a detriment to your schooling to take on another job that cuts in to your already limited time for studies.
3. Work both jobs and cut back on the amount of classes you take. Nursing school is a full-time job in and of itself, so the fact that you are working at all – let alone a full-time job – is rather remarkable. If your finances don't allow you to work less than full-time, then you should consider going to school less in order to give your full attention to both of your jobs.

Even though it seems like a good idea to have as many things as possible on your resume, you really aren't doing yourself any favors by burning the candle at both ends. Not only will your work performance likely drop, but your attention to details that will really matter down the line

may be affected by trying to do too much. If you really must have it all, then by all means, go for it; but I cannot in good conscience advise adding anything to your incredibly packed schedule. Good luck with nursing school – if you can make it through this time in your life, I'm confident you will do great things!

Best,

Becca

Q: *Dearest Becca,*

I struggle sometimes with deadlines. When a paper is approaching I tend to procrastinate until the last minute and my work struggles from it. I also work full time and typically prioritize my work life over my school life. I am trying to dedicate more of my time to school, but my personal life and work life seem to be getting in the way. What would you say are some of your strategies for balancing the work/school/life time management?

A: Dearest Elliot,

One of the best things I've learned from my own struggles with procrastination is to embrace it. You procrastinate. And that's okay. I also procrastinate. Some people need that added pressure in order to get everything done. That's not a poor reflection of you, but rather an invitation to more deeply evaluate what is important to you and how you can work with yourself to achieve your goals.

As a student who has worked and gone to school full-time, I understand the struggle. For the first few years of college, I thought I was a terrible student because I left everything to the last minute. I always managed to get things done (and I think a little differently than you, my grades/

work didn't suffer from it), but I stressed for days leading up to an assignment, and constantly berated myself for failing to use my time properly.

My first piece of advice is to stop that.

You're just going to waste more time and energy wishing you were a different kind of student. I'm not a miracle worker, so this kind of thinking is only getting in your way.

Once you've embraced the fact that you are a procrastinator and probably will always be a procrastinator, the next step is to make your procrastination productive. There are two options: either break a task into smaller tasks, or continue to avoid large, daunting tasks.

Let me explain.

If I have a large project that I'm working on, I often stress myself out because the task seems so insurmountable that I don't even know where to begin. One of my frequently used strategies is to dissect my workload until it's broken into nice, small, and slightly less terrifying segments. This way I can do one thing that seems like less work while I'm actually doing my work. I know, super sneaky.

Another favorite strategy that I have still involves procrastination, believe it or not. When I'm faced with a daunting challenge in school or work, I avoid it as long as humanly possible. Yet, before the penultimate hour is nigh and I *must* begin working on said project, I work on other things. I make my procrastination work to my advantage – and it normally produces pretty good work for me.

For example, I have a paper due soon that I'm dreading to write. This important paper is due on Saturday and I've barely made my way through an outline, let alone a draft or a readable paper (and don't even get me started on references!). I have no intention of starting this paper until Friday because that's when my stress levels will finally compel me to start writing. But I've

found that the answer is to not wish I would start writing earlier (or indeed, try and force myself to start writing earlier), but to work on other things that are less daunting between now and then. I often write out two separate “to-do lists”: one is the major, life-alteringly huge assignments and tasks that I *need* to finish; the other is a list of *smaller, slightly more enjoyable, and more manageable tasks*.

List one: important essay due on Saturday. List two: playing video games for ENGH 488. After I have written out my lists, I decide exactly how long each task will take me (there’s some wiggle room, it’s pretty hard to know how long something will take you when you haven’t done it yet), but I estimate a general idea of how much time I need to finish everything. I can write essays fairly quickly, so those require less time than trying to finish Bioshock (I don’t play videogames), so I gauge my time based on my strengths and past experiences.

Then, I start doing things on my second list (the *slightly more enjoyable* tasks that still need to get done). The items on this list still need to happen, even though they don’t seem to be as important as the *important* list. However, for me personally, I have found that once I’ve finished a certain number of small things, I have a greater capacity to focus on my *important* things. And, by that point, I’ve often arrived at the point where I absolutely need to start whatever life-threateningly important assignment is upon me.

So, dearest Elliot, I hope this helps you with your struggles to create a work life balance. (It should be noted that the items you put on these lists can be anything – they don’t have to be school related. An *important* thing might be a work project or shift, and a *slightly less important* thing might be cleaning your room. There’s a flexibility in the lists, and you should make these work for you, rather than the other way around). Although I can’t address all your concerns about work, school, and social life balance, I think that both these strategies might be

helpful to you in multiple areas of life and finding what works for you as you navigate between them.

From one procrastinator to another, keep calm and do the thing (later)!

Best,

Becca