The learning curve for new principals is steep, and figuring out how to deal with all of the challenges that come with running a school can seem like a daunting task. In fact, managing these tasks in a timely and efficient manner often proves to be new principals’ biggest challenge. We asked several veteran principals to offer their best advice on how to use time more effectively. These tips are valuable for anyone who wants to spend less time feeling overwhelmed and more time leading a successful school.

**START EARLY:** Organize your day to ensure that you have an hour of “alone time” each morning. If everyone arrives at 8:00 a.m., arrive at 7:00 a.m.! Set friendly boundaries to ensure your time is respected. For example, keep your door closed for this hour and ask those you work with to help you preserve this time to prepare and organize your day. In that hour, be sure to make a list of the items you plan to accomplish as the day progresses. This single hour will allow you to open your office door and step into the day with a feeling of achievement!

—Melissa D. Patschke, Royersford, PA

**DO IT NOW:** When a parent contacts you regarding an issue, resolve it right away. Parent concerns get larger the longer a “communication gap” exists between the school and home. Resolve the issue while it is as small as it is going to be. Waiting for a “cooling off” period rarely works in the school’s favor. Attacking an issue promptly gives the impression that you and the school are “on top of things” and competent. Remember one of a principal’s first axioms: Never put off an angry parent.

—Patrick Boodey, Dover, NH

**DO IT BY THE BOOK:** To process parent concerns and calls, I use a little red composition book that sits beside my phone in my office. Any time a parent calls, I open the book and write the date, the concern or issue, and what we agree to do as a result of the conversation. This keeps a fluid record of parent interactions, and I can quickly find conversations that we’ve had over time. For teacher concerns, I use a black book that I keep in the front of my drawer with my teacher files. I date the page and record what I said to the teacher, what the teacher said to me, and what we
agreed to do. Using both books helps me quickly keep tabs on trending conversations with parents and teachers.

—Peter S. Carpenter, Bel Air, MD

**EXPLAIN EVERY “NO”:** When dealing with students, families, or staff, “yeses” rarely need explanations but “noes” always do. Explaining your decisions helps create predictable boundaries and values that help others make decisions, so you do not have to do so later. If you cannot explain why you said no, you need to do some more fact finding or reflection to figure out why.

—Patrick Boodey

**DIGITIZE YOUR TO-DO LIST:**
The principalship is one of the most cyclical jobs on the planet. Much of what you do on a day-to-day basis you will also do this same time next year, next month, or next week. What if, when you performed one of those “repeating tasks” the first time, you never had to think about it again, and you were reminded at exactly the right time? Create your to-do list with one of the many digital options available. My favorite is Toodledo.com. When a new task comes to mind, put it on the list and choose when the task will repeat. Are there details related to that task? Enter them in the note section. They will be there this time and every time you perform that particular task. There is no need to reinvent the wheel every year.

—Frank Buck, Pell City, AL

**TIME-SAVING CHEAT SHEET**

- **START EARLY:** Carve out an hour to yourself.
- **DO IT NOW:** Resolve parent concerns as they occur.
- **BY THE BOOK:** Keep track of parent versus teacher concerns.
- **EXPLAIN “NO”:** Explain your decision-making process.
- **DIGITAL TO-DO LIST:** Schedule cyclical tasks.
- **ONE BIG BINDER:** Collect and organize important paperwork.
- **HANDLE PAPERWORK ONLY ONCE:** Make it a priority to handle paper only one time. Complete the task immediately, file it, or delegate the task to another person on your team. Don’t allow papers to stack up thinking you will deal with them later. Only more will come and the amount of paperwork can become overwhelming! As for emails, set specific times throughout the day to read and deal with them. Coming in a few minutes early to read emails allows you to begin the day with items already off your plate. Handle emails as you do paperwork: answer, file, or delegate. Don’t put off dealing with the email to another time—only more will come!

—Diane K. Hull, Dailey, WV

- **STICK TO YOUR CALENDAR:**

**USE ONE BIG BINDER:** My lifesaving strategy is that each year I get a large binder. As important things come to me, such as my AYP letter, teachers’ schedules, itinerant schedules, and after-school programs, I add them to the binder. At the end of each nine weeks, I organize it. The binder organizes the things I need to attend to as the year goes on. It’s also a helpful resource for substitutes, or for when I need to give out information to the community.

—Rosie Young, Louisville, KY

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—Miguel Cardona, Meriden, CT

**CONDUCT “STAND UP” MEETINGS:**
In order to make the most out of staff meetings we have a “Stand Up” meeting. We meet around a short wall of bookcases—no chairs. Teachers are able to focus on the topic, hear the information, offer suggestions, and then get back to work. We only discuss what really needs to be discussed. These meetings can occur more frequently, but should be limited to the one or two items on the agenda. Just remember that there are still times to have a sit down, full agenda meeting—

—Kimberly Lisanby-Barber, Spring Valley, IL

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—Rosie Young, Louisville, KY

**END OF YEAR REFLECTION:**
On the last day of school, we meet as a staff to reflect upon the school year. During this meeting we talk about what we want to keep for the next year, what we want to eliminate, and what we want to add. We also note all of the activities we want to keep or add on a master calendar for the upcoming school year, then assign responsibility for the activity to a committee or person. This saves a lot of time at the beginning of and throughout the year.

—Rosie Young