

Physician Services

Time management – You can be a winner

Time-management procedures often do not allow for busy lives that are too demanding. Plus, busy people usually do not allow enough time to accomplish tasks. So how do successful people win at the time-management game?

The fact is, every day has the same 24 hours for everyone. The reason some people seem to have *more* time is that they live under a simple principle best summarized as follows:

"You'll never find time. It isn't lost. You're living it. You have to consciously decide to live it in certain ways and not others. You have to make time by taking it away from one activity and giving it to another." (From *Time Management* by Marshall Cook.)

Much of good time management revolves around this basic principle. When you consider that most of us in the workplace also have a family life and the need for some personal time, being "chronologically challenged" does not appear to provide much hope of giving these three aspects of our lives the attention that they demand.

Good time management teaches ways to reach the goal of keeping these three aspects in balance, adjusting each week -- or day -- to include accomplishing what is important and dealing with what is urgent.

When we turn to time management and apply it to managing a busy practice, it seems impossible to accomplish everything. We all seem busy, but are we productive? Busy people only tend to the urgent. Productive people tend to the important. Busy people feel stressed, anxious and overwhelmed. Productive people feel in control, are motivated and are able to complete tasks.

How can healthcare providers become good time managers and learn to tend to the important and deal with the urgent? Our goal is to move from "busy" to "productive" by learning to practice four basic time-management skills and apply them to practice management:

1. Work Ahead

- Anticipate and plan for the known.
- Control all the factors you can.
- Plan to complete your work activities before you go home.
- Develop a weekly schedule that includes all of your mandatory activities.
- Review and revise your schedule daily.

Practice Management Tip: Schedule at least 30 minutes each day to work at your desk (with NO telephone calls) to complete paperwork and revise your next day's schedule. This time investment will reward you with saved time and the feeling of being more in control.

2. Set Priorities

- Remember that demands on your time will always exceed your ability to do them all.
- Distinguish between the URGENT and the IMPORTANT.

- Several times each day ask yourself, "Is this what I want or need to be doing right now?" If it's not, do it later.

Practice Management Tip: Have a "stand-up" staff meeting each morning for no more than 15 minutes. Have everyone state what their priorities are for the day. Adjust individual priorities to match the group's needs. Everyone will leave the meeting working toward common goals.

3. **Learn to Problem Solve**

- Define the current situation.
- List all the possible outcomes or solutions.
- Consider the worst outcome for each.
- Decide the course of action that best meets the needs of everyone involved.
- Make a decision and stick with it.

Practice Management Tip: Include staff in the problem-solving process to increase their buy-in to solutions. Spend more time on the first step, defining the real problem. Don't invest good time in the wrong problem.

4. **Touch Things Once**

- Complete one activity before proceeding to the next.
- Check staff work thoroughly to avoid having to correct mistakes later.
- Find a routine that works for you and stick to it.
- Stay in control of paperwork.
- Teach these habits to your staff.

Practice Management Tip: Schedule specific times for employees to sit down with you and review work. Avoid interruptions during these meetings to allow you to concentrate on the demands in front of you and not have to re-do work later.

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