

# TIME IS THE ONLY REAL CAPITAL THAT ANY HUMAN BEING HAS, AND THE ONLY THING HE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE.

- Thomas Edison



## How to Own Your Time

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Who feels like there aren't enough hours in the day to complete our tasks? \*raises hand\* This is, alas, a burden for many professionals. And if you're reading this, this is likely an issue for you as well. The reason we chose this subject for the WDS newsletter editorial is because not many people feel like they ever truly master the issue of time management. Right when we think we figure it out, or when we are in the swing of things, then **BAM!** A new life change, baby, project, career curveball, or car issue arises.

Health care providers are most at risk for time juggling, particularly during residency, our early career, during family rearing, or during the era of increased documentation. Let me start by saying- you (we) are not alone. Fortunately, I've sifted through so many self-help books and articles as a way to procrastinate, so I feel eager to share a few notes.

### YOU CAN'T DO IT ALL

#### *Multitasking is overrated.*

It often leads to spending more time than doing the two tasks separately. Or it just leads to doing both tasks poorly. What are some things that only you can do? And what can you delegate instead?

#### *To the top.*

What are the top TWO tasks you absolutely need to do today? Front load these tasks in your day.

#### *Rank the importance of things and urgency of tasks.*

For example, completing an article for the program may be important but not urgent. Administrative burdens may be urgent and important. There are some things that are neither urgent nor important. Do away with these if you can. And if you can't, do more important-urgent things first.

### BE OBJECTIVE

#### *What do you actually NEED to do?*

Sure, learning French may be up there but how does that relate to seeing patients and seeing family members?

#### *Track your time for a week.*

This will help you see where your time is actually going. Often, we don't objectively see what we are doing with our time. i.e. "I need to spend more time charting." Well maybe you actually spend 2 hours daily on charting and need to become more efficient.

Track how many times in a day that you have "fires" you need to put out. If it's 2 times a day on most days, set aside time for that. Should nothing happen, then this can be your buffer time to grab other tasks off of your to-do-list.

Make a list of all the things you regret doing in a day. Like eating that donut... or rather spending 15 minutes eating the donut *and* chatting. Are there recurrent time warps in your day? It's okay to have time slip-ups, but plan against them in the future.

## ROME WASN'T BUILT IN ONE DAY

### *Give yourself an honest time budget.*

Some experts believe we underestimate the amount of time needed to complete a project. When budgeting time, think in detail of how many things need to be done. Imagine a TDL with a task similar to this: *write case study*. Well to revamp it, include this beneath the case study: *pull patient chart, obtain patient consent for clinical images, email pathologist for pathology images, write case study, complete authorship forms, meet with Dr. X, literature search*, etc. Sum up the time needed then add a bit of time to the final time budget.

## SHOULD YOU LEAN IN OR OUT?

### *Try leaning out.*

Sometimes we forget the big picture by trying to lean in on too many things. When a family member is in the hospital, I bet only a few things are truly important at that time. We often keep ourselves in check, but I think this exercise is very important if you start to feel overwhelmed with all your tasks.

## TIME MAPPING WITH TO-DO-LISTS

### *Block your time.*

In Harvard Business Review's 20 Minute Manager booklet on time management, they adapted a time blocking technique that crosses with a to-do-list. First, you create time increments (i.e. 30 minutes segments) then block out this time for broad categories. For example, patient care, charting, projects, education, exercise, family time, or errands can be categories. Feel free to adjust to your needs. Within these segments you can manage your TDL. What is both urgent and important in this category? And set firm time frames. For example, whether or not you are finished with administrative duties on weekdays, you will need to leave at 5PM sharp to see your family.

## LAGNIAPPE TIME

### *A little somethin' extra.*

Believe it or not, you need buffer time. You need a little lagniappe time. Southerners know what this means. You need time for an impromptu coffee, lunch, or break. Leave your schedule open for certain time slots and don't pencil in anything!