TIME MANAGEMENT FOR RESEARCHERS

Monica Gandhi
Definition of the problem

- “Too much to do” described as single biggest stress by early career faculty

- Of 21 workplace "stresses“, 40% were time-related
  - Nearly 80% felt stressed by both lack of work-life balance and "too many time pressure"
  - Nearly 70% already concerned about burnout

- Specific concerns
  - Too much paperwork,
  - Not enough time for research and other academic pursuits
  - Lack of control over how time was spent.

Bellini LM. Stresses and workplace resources for academic junior faculty: track and gender comparisons. Acad Med 2001
Principles of the time management problem in early career faculty

- **New problem**: Medical training (for example) very structured and faculty position may be 1st time mentee managing their own time

- **Takes time to gain time**: Learning time management skills from workshop, book may help but takes time and mentor should not expect rapid change

- **Some people don’t want to change**: Chaos may be way of life for some, and they can’t change

*Simply telling someone to be more efficient does not work* – Susan Johnson MD, U. of Iowa.
Basic principles

- Our supply of time cannot be expanded,
- We do not have time to do everything in which we are interested
- Thus, how we choose to spend our time is critical to successfully accomplishing our goals.
First step in time management – saying “no”

- Early career faculty often get into trap of saying yes to everything (pause)
- Say “no” to
  - Chapter writing (peer review articles are a better use of time)
  - Joining a committee (that provides no direct career benefit)
  - Being an editor
  - Devoting excessive extra time to patient care activities
  - Collaborating on someone else's grant (when the research is not central to the junior person's focus).
How to say “no”

- Early career faculty find it difficult to say no to senior colleagues, don’t know what is in their best interest, fearful of missing opportunities
- Provide a cover story – “My Division Chief won’t let me do this”
- CFAR and research mentor should review your activities twice-yearly (IDP) and help take things “off the plate”
When to say yes

- Is it interesting?
- Is it meaningful?
- Is it aligned with the goals of my Department?
- Strategically aligned with my Division
- Will it help me grow, learn?
- Am I the only one or best one to do it?
- Is it worth doing and is it worth doing well? (don’t do it if not worth it)
- Are there other things more important to you?
You need both productivity and well being

- Current academic structure demands
  - Constant email contact, no vacations, working long hours, little sleep

Myth: The best way to get more work done is to work longer hours.

- No single myth is more destructive to employers and employees than this one. The reason is that we're not designed to operate like computers — at high speeds, continuously, for long periods of time.

- Instead, human beings are designed to pulse intermittently between spending and renewing energy. Great performers — and enlightened leaders — recognize that it's not the number of hours people work that determines the value they create, but rather the energy they bring to whatever hours they work.

Schwartz, Tony. HBR Blog Network; Four Destructive Myths Most Companies Still Live By
What your mentor is hopefully modeling for you!

- Be explicit that faculty members will be evaluated based on the outcomes, not on "face time."
- Do they take vacations, nights off, weekends out of the communication loop and encourage others to do the same.
- Do they talk to you about what you do to relax and relieve stress.
- Long hours are sometimes the result of a workplace that is so filled with distractions that work requiring concentration - like writing - can't be done during normal hours. It is OK to close the door or go off site to do intensive work.
- You will burn out if don’t refuel, less creativity
Time sink #1: Meetings

- Make sure the meeting is needed,
- Invite only the people who need to be there,
- Circulate an agenda in advance,
- Start and end on time,
- Stay on topic,
- Create explicit next steps at the end,
- Make sure it is clear who is responsible for each step or task, and
- Follow up to be sure these are done
- Send outlook invitations
Time sink #2: Getting email under control

1. Turn off the notification announcing each email
   - Distracts from task you are performing
   - Try to check email 3 times a day – beginning, middle, end. If need to more frequently, set timer to check every hour
   - Best practice from national experts, email can interrupt you 11x/15 minutes

2. Put your contact information in automatic signature
   - Encourage rapid phone calls to avoid confusing email chains

3. Keep your inbox small
   - Deal with and delete
   - Create 3 folders: “Waiting for” (waiting for reply), “Projects” and “Reference”
Getting email under control - continued

- Short emails, convey factual information
- Do not convey emotion or discuss political issues (Traceable and best done by phone, person)
- Make subject line informative (not “hi”, but “Location of journal club changed to library”, “are you available on xx date”)
- Think carefully – do you need to “cc” that person?
1. Complete at least one important task each day before you look at e-mail (finish the abstract)

2. Set a limit for the amount time you will spend on e-mail at a session – 10 minutes, 30 minutes, 2 hours. Do not get caught up in a never-ending session

3. Work through your messages one at a time, starting with either the most recent or the oldest– and NO SKIPPING!
Working through email

For each message, do one of the following:

1) delete
2) file (reference or a project file)
3) respond / do the requested task, or
4) defer to a later time (try to minimize deferred)
Priority management- don’t let your emails become your priority

- What’s the most important thing to do this week?
  1. For today and for this week?
  2. What time of day am I doing my best work?
  3. Calendar it in and don’t do anything else during that time
  4. Usually set this calendar for week on M or F
- Decide!
  - Delete
  - Save needed information
  - File
  - Move to Optional Reading folder
  - Do / reply now (or move to “Waiting for”)

~ 90% completed

- Defer to later
  - Ask “Why?” until you come with a plan to deal with
Tracking work

**TODAY**

1. The things you habitually do without needing a written reminder

2. Calendar

3. Daily task plan

**Master Project List**

All work that is currently in progress, or needs to be started soon.

**Ideas for later list**

Anything you are planning, or might considering doing, later – keep either on a list, or on the calendar.

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- Calendar
- Daily task plan
- Master Project List
- Ideas for later list
Rule 1
Keep *one* calendar that includes *all* your time commitments
Rule 2

Use a calendar with a daily view option that includes both a time grid and a “note” section
Calendar

- 8:00 AM: Conference call
- 12:00 PM: MEETING
- 3:00 PM:  
- 5:00 PM: make dinner /spaghetti and meatballs

Time grid

- Events – everything that you have agreed to “attend”
Calendar

Time grid

- Events
- Transition time

8
Conference call

12
Travel between meetings

MEETING

5
make dinner / spaghetti and meatballs
Calendar

Time grid

- Events
- Transition time
- Tasks that must be done at a specific time

8
- Conference call
  - Travel between meetings

12
- MEETING

3
- = call john re: tomorrow’s meeting

5
- = take meeting folder home
  - make dinner / spaghetti and meatballs
Time grid

- Tasks that must be done at a specific time
- Events
- Transition time

- "Appointments with yourself"

Calendar

- Conference call
- Travel between meetings
- MEETING
- Work on first draft division budget
- Take meeting folder home
- Make dinner: spaghetti and meatballs
- Call John re: tomorrow’s meeting
Calendar

Today: Pay visa bill

Notes

- Tasks that must be done sometime today
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pay visa bill</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tasks</strong> that <strong>must</strong> be done sometime today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WF Jane to email back</strong></td>
<td><strong>WF</strong> people you are <em>waiting for</em> responses from today</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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</table>
Calendar

Pay visa bill

WF Jane to email back

DEADLINE paper submission due

Notes

- Tasks that must be done sometime today

- WF responses you are waiting for today

- Deadlines
### Calendar

<table>
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<th>Time</th>
<th>Task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>WF</strong> Jane to email back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>DEADLINE</strong> paper submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Reminder</strong> Submit time sheets <em>(weekly)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes

- **Tasks** that *must* be done sometime today
- **WF** responses you are *waiting for* today
- **Deadlines**
- **Reminders** *(e.g. daily, weekly, monthly, annual, irregular)*
Calendar

<table>
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<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make dinner: spaghetti and meatballs</td>
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Pay visa bill
WF Jane to email back
DEADLINE paper submission
Reminder Submit time sheets (weekly)

The hard landscape:
When appointments and tasks are done, you can go home!
Master list

Personal

Research new bicycle choices for Harry, an
narrow to two choices for his review

Send invitations to my family for
Labor Day party, by mid-July

... and so on

Work

Create draft of new evaluation system for team
to review

Hire new secretary II

Finalize budget for fall speaker program

... and so on

Features:

- All planned work*
- Both work and home
- Items described as results
- “Running” format

* Except calendared events and
daily routine tasks
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ROI        | Submit STRAND paper, Submit NEW.TLC paper, VOICE abstract IAS, Haberer analysis, IAVT paper, CFQA reports - LFVr, SMARTT concept sheet revision, JAIDS.NWP, Kenya revision, Start planning renewal | 1. Wait for AFE comments  
2. Submit TPV STRAND paper  
3. Edit NEW.TLC paper from Yong  
4. Await input on NEW.TLC paper, Peter, Yong  
5. Finish NEW.TLC paper after Yong's input  
6. Write Thai longitudinal paper  
7. Analyze maternal HIV PROMOTE data  
8. Analyze Haberer data  
9. CRDI 2016 poster - iPreX OLE  
10. iPreX OLE paper  
11. Send in CFQA 3rd revision - TPV  
12. Write and send in NEW.TLC - 1st draft  
13. Write progress report  
14. SMARTT concept sheet (address site support, power calculations, standardization of duration of exposure studied in hair and covariates analysis) |
| Clinic director | Customer service campaign for 2016 Staffing | 1. PHAST RN interviews  
2. Plan December provider meeting  
3. Draft 2016 provider meetings  
5. Plan fellows for 2017 |
| CoE book project | Gere chapter, Maternowska chapter, Cohen chapter, Estes chapter, Perlman chapter | 1. Revise Maternowska and send on  
2. Revise Gupta  
3. Revise Perlman |
| Mentoring grant (R24) with Mallory | Write paper with Mallory on first mentoring meeting  
Move forward on Peru and Africa papers  
Write 2nd mentoring meeting paper | 1. Write David by July 13  
2. Talk to David July 13  
3. Edit methods/results section next  
4. Submit paper  
5. Write results discussion of SF meeting  
6. Draft international mentoring paper  
7. Plan South Africa meeting  
8. Meet Mallory to start R24 planning |
| Talks | ID boot camp | 1. HIV talk for ID boot camp |
| HIV, MMA | | 1. Manage talk for ID boot camp  
2. Single pill combination talk  
3. Epa talk for MMA  
4. Clinical talk January 7 - estravirine  
5. Clinical talk January 7 - estravirine  
6. GHS 5S talk 1/4/16 |
| Cati (mentee) | BIRCWH grant  
Faculty pay plan  
K23 grant | 1. IAS abstract – VOICE  
2. K23 planning |
| Personal | Health | 1. Submit receipt for Africa meeting  
2. Do labs  
3. Go to dentist  
4. Children vaccinations |
Getting started with a master list

- Record what is on your mind:
  - What do I need to finish this week?
  - What do I need to finish in the next month or so?
  - What do I need to finish by 3 to 6 months from now?

- Add what is already in your system:
  - Add items from any existing to-do lists
  - Go through your calendar for the next few months

- List each of your areas of responsibility (i.e. “hats”) and ask for each, what do I need to do for this “hat”
  - “Hat” Examples: Parent, Partner, Runner, PTA President, Residency Director, Clinician, Division Director, Grant PI
For each item:

1. Is this something I am committed to do?
2. Is this the right time to do it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List Destination</th>
<th>1st - Committed?</th>
<th>2nd - Now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Master List</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ideas for later</td>
<td>Ideas for later</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Paper / document based options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>Document file</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal pad</td>
<td>Word document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-ring binder</td>
<td>Excel spreadsheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index cards</td>
<td>Plain text file</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post its ™ stuck in a single location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Sample list manager programs /apps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Free, any OS</th>
<th>any OS / web based</th>
<th>iOS only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember the Milk</td>
<td>Outlook Tasks</td>
<td>OmniFocus ($$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toodledo (premium version $)</td>
<td>Doit.im ($)</td>
<td>Things ($$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wunderlist</td>
<td>Nirvana ($)</td>
<td>Reminders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

... and numerous others
Questions?