

Taking Time to Make Time

Save to myBoK

by Cheryl M. Smith, NS, RHIT, CPHQ

In today's healthcare environment, time is a vital resource. HIM department leaders work to develop skills and use tools to manage personnel, budgets, and projects, but few consider investing in the development of the skills needed to manage time. While time management may be a new concept to some managers, others have learned the hard way that it is not a luxury.

Why can't managers manage their time more effectively? Managers tend to spend their days in a frenzy of activity: running from meeting to meeting and solving crisis after crisis. Further, managers tend to concentrate on how busy their day is instead of the results of their daily activity. A useful metric is the Pareto Principle, or the 80/20 rule, which states that typically 80 percent of unfocused effort generates only 20 percent of results, and the remaining 80 percent of results are achieved with only 20 percent of the effort. Time management allows managers to concentrate as much of their effort as possible on the most important tasks and achieve the best results for their time investment.¹

Creating More Time

How does a manager create more time? One way may be to consider time as an investment instead of a function that needs to be managed. The investment concept of time management can help managers achieve their desired goals. Consider following these strategies as you move toward making an investment in your time:²

- review goals and link them to activities to keep you on target
- prioritize each activity that will take you closer to your goals
- set deadlines for critical activities
- each day, plan your schedule for the next day to support your goals, while maintaining flexibility to handle emergencies
- schedule creative or challenging activities for peak hours
- take charge of interruptions: find out what is needed, how long it will take, how urgent it is, and if possible, schedule a time later to address the situation
- plan phone calls: make outgoing phone calls at one time

Trying to balance all the demands on your time can be overwhelming. By identifying clear short- and long-term goals for your and your staff, you accomplish more while feeling more in control of your time. Review goals frequently and update them as they change. Also, recognize that some tasks are more important than others.³

Help your staff prioritize their goals. Create an organized, department task list and put the most important tasks at the top of the list, while keeping in mind that some tasks can take longer than anticipated.⁴ Set goals you can achieve and allow yourself to feel satisfied with your accomplishment.

E-mail: Time's Newest Thief

Electronic mail was heralded as the savior of time: a new communication tool that would put first-class mail out of business. Indeed, e-mail has become a quick and easy way to communicate and many managers prefer to send a short e-mail message to employees instead of making a phone call. However, some managers feel that e-mail has become a source of stress because the number of messages received increases every day. According to Donald E. Wetmore, a time management expert, the average businessperson receives approximately 80 e-mails per day and many feel that 80 percent of the messages in their in box are of little or no value.

Because e-mail is here to stay, finding a way to manage this tool is critical to managers. Begin by prioritizing your e-mail. Is the message something that should be handled, is there a deadline, does it need action, or is it just information? After prioritizing it, set up folders by subject or topic area and file or delete the message. Most software can connect messages that follow a

particular topic into a "thread" or "conversation." Following a thread can help you keep track of important subjects. Finally, set aside time every day to read, file, and delete your e-mail.⁵

No Longer a Luxury

Time management can no longer be considered a luxury but a necessity. It's essential to a manager's productivity and helps decrease some of the stress associated with the lack of time associated with the responsibilities of management. "So much to do and so little time," is the cry of many burned-out managers. To counteract this, take time to invest in your time management skills. Time management can help you increase your productivity, accomplish your goals, and improve your everyday work environment.

Notes

1. "How to Achieve More With Your Time." Available at the Mind Tools Web site at www.mindtools.com/tmintro.html.
2. Haddock, Patricia. "Stop Managing Time To Achieve Goals." Available at the Smartbiz Web site at www.smartbiz.com/sbs/columns/pat48.htm.
3. "Managing Time." Available at the Pennsylvania State University Office of Human Resources Web site at www.ohr.psu.edu/health/qt_2.htm.
4. "Managing Time."
5. "Managing Email Overload." Available at the Quiet Place Web site at www.btinternet.com/~martin.liddament/emailstress.htm.

Reference

Wetmore, Donald E. "Easing E-mail." Available at the Productivity Institute Web site at <http://www.balancetime.com/article-month.htm#email>.

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