

# TIME Management CE Diploma T-TIME session

## October 14, 2021

### Tips and Strategies to Consider

Here are some lessons learned over the years, from your suggestions in the small groups at T-TIME, and from the references:

#### Admin work/email/ academics

1. For in-basket/EMR tasks and **email management**, try to **deal with each thing once**. The first time you open it, try to deal with it - delete, reply, forward, or postpone in that moment. You can leave things as "unread" until you have time to deal with them. Try not to spend too much time on any one thing. Do email in scheduled blocks of dedicated time.
2. Use prepared or **automatic replies** as answers when possible. For more complex issues, arrange a **meeting to chat** rather than typing a long response (this can take longer to do than you might realize, and is often hard for those receiving it to manage the time to read it). Email is not great for communication!
3. Take courses, watch YouTube tutorials, or work with someone who can teach you how to **use your computer software to its full functionality**. There are tons of options in Outlook that can help manage your emails. Google Drive and other cloud options can help you manage shared documents/manuscripts quicker. This is easier than sending around emails with attachments, then trying to figure out what edition you are working on and wasting time trying to incorporate edits.
4. Make **meetings, even with individuals, "action oriented"**. Determine at the end of the meeting who is going to do what by when (and then book time to make sure you get your part done). If you need to do something, book the time in your schedule to do it.
5. **Create timelines and deadlines for doing things**. Be realistic and give yourself enough time to do things but work to deadlines. If you have no timeline to a deadline, it will be hard to manage your time. Keep track. You can't manage what you don't measure.
6. **Live by the motto - "If it's not booked, it won't get done"**. "Book" everything in scheduling software like Outlook including: email, writing and research time, meetings including phone calls and informal meetings, travel time to get to meetings including walking time, phone calls to family, etc.
7. **Don't beat yourself up for working when you want to**. If you have some downtime (which everyone says should be protected from "work"), work if you want to - that is what I do. I enjoy my work and have felt a bit pressured over the years to be more "balanced". It turns out my happy place is a bit unbalanced and I now know that's okay. It is not a time-based measure of balance but a "joy-based" concept.
8. **Remember - every time you say "yes" to someone or something, you are in effect saying "no" to something else**. Make sure you say yes to the things that are important to you and move your life, your job, and your project in the direction you want. For example, if you want to get promoted, you should read the guidelines for promotion and then say yes to those things that are on the promotions list and will "count" when you need them. You need to know where you are going to manage your time effectively.

9. Talk to your department head, if applicable, and make sure that you have dedicated time to do the things you are responsible for. If your position requires you to do something, then the time to accomplish it should be provided, respected, and protected if possible.
10. **Book "catch up time" once a month.** Protect this time. It can be for the bigger deliverables that need attention or for important projects that need uninterrupted, dedicated time to finish. Negotiate when you can to be paid in such a way that facilitates this. Having some autonomy in your work is important and helps with job satisfaction and retention.
11. A course in **project management** can be a great investment.
12. **Keep lists.** Use a visual analogue system such as Ugmonk. I use my computer desktop as a list of a sort - nothing leaves my desktop until it is done. That works for me because I need to have visual reminders - so when I log on - there it is. I also use paper lists and Post-it notes!
13. **Take advantage of unexpected opportunities.** Work on a laptop during travel in a car/plane. Use a MiFi unit to give you internet access in all kinds of places you might not otherwise have access.
14. **Find your productive time and optimize it; some start their days early while others prefer evenings.** (My kids are now grown so that is a luxury, I know.) I am usually the first one in my clinic in the mornings but I need that time to set things up to run smoothly, including preparing the coffee and putting out snacks.
15. **Pay people to do certain tasks that could save you time from doing them yourself.** Sometimes there are grants - like summer research projects paid by a grant from our dean's office for med students (for not too much work on my end). I have hired a medical or nursing student who has been identified as needing some financial assistance and have had them do some part-time work for a short time, usually for a specific project deliverable as appropriate. At home I have hired people to do housecleaning, window cleaning, and last summer I ordered groceries online and had them delivered for the first time - it was amazing! I have let go of the idea that I have to do everything (and it's good for the economy too!).
16. **Take breaks and holidays.** Sometimes my worst time use is when I need a break. I don't always have much insight into this. It may be my partner who points this out. But there comes a time when I spin my wheels and can't get much done even with the time I have. Taking a break when you think you can least afford to do so is sometimes just the shot in the arm you need to ensure your time management and effectiveness bounce back.
17. **Under-promise and overdeliver.** I've found over the years that I have a very unrealistic view of time, and I suspect I am not alone. I can concentrate on something for hours and the time will feel like minutes. I love "the zone", but it is a time warp. I think things are never going to take as long as they do – sometimes they take twice as long as I predicted. So now I try to work that into my calculations. If I think I will need X amount of time to do something, I might then schedule 2X because otherwise I am overpromising and underdelivering and that just gets too stressful.
18. **Multitasking.** We likely don't do this well but there are times when you may find it very helpful and time efficient. If I am in a meeting and can do a few emails during times that are not critical to me or my contributions aren't needed, I do the email. (For in person meetings, I will often ask the person next to me if that is okay because I don't want to be distracting or appear rude). For online meetings I have a standing desk. Then I can I turn my camera off and go up and down on a step for exercise while I am in the meeting. I like trying to find time efficiencies which can mean trying to do two things at once. When it works it sure feels good, but I appreciate our brains are not wired for this.

19. **Learn to say no.** You can say “no” in a kind way. You might say if asked to join a project - *"That sounds like an excellent project and I am so excited you are working on this. I would love to join you but if I were to say yes right now, I would be afraid that I would not be able to commit the time and that would jeopardize the project which I would hate to do, so I am going to say no....."* or even *"Just let me think about this for a few days, if I can make it work, I will let you know but I am in a time crunch right now and I want this to all work for you...."*. Let it go. If there is anything I have learned over the years, opportunities come around again. What you can't do now, you may be able to do several years from now, and that's okay. Let it go and don't feel guilty. You can't do it all, so pick and choose with deliberate thought and care what you commit to.
20. **Prioritize** so you can focus on what is important work and not be constantly putting out fires which can be the unimportant yet demanding side of work. This is described in Covey's book entitled First Things First.

## Clinically

21. Never go home without finishing patient care notes - **“Do today's work today”**. Not only is today the best time to do a patient care note (it's freshest in your mind) but putting stuff off dumps work on a colleague you care about and on you in the future.
22. Move your clinical schedule to a **length of visit that works for you** to get everything done including charting/ dictating.
23. You may want to **“chunk” some of your clinical time and location** if you have control to do that. Less travel time can save time.
24. **Learn to delegate.** Do physician / faculty work - the stuff that your training and expertise is geared to. Let others around you work to their top of scope.
25. If you have an **administrative assistant**, they can do a lot of your scheduling with guidelines from you. This can include responding to doodle polls on your behalf.
26. **Residents** can have a group of patients (within your practice) and with your supervision, they can take responsibility for those patients and ownership of all the elements of that work. You can send them the forms to be completed, the labs - all the paperwork- because they must learn this juggle and we can "share the load" appropriately.
27. **Use clinical "kits"**. I use small portable plastic boxes with "all my favorite things" for specific visits so I don't have to go looking for stuff. Exam rooms should be laid out and stocked exactly the same.
28. Try not to leave a patient exam room during a visit. If you leave, you are apt to get interrupted and that can throw off time management in clinic settings. Clinical time management is really a topic unto itself.
29. Have stuff **ready to go for patients in advance of their visit** so you won't waste time during patient care trying to find things, or print things, etc.
30. Use **brief huddles with staff and colleagues** before each clinical half-day to discuss how the day is going to go; whether there may be any time glitches, and if so, how to problem solve these in advance.
31. **Eat snacks and drink water** because we all manage time better when we are not hungry or thirsty. Pay attention to your own health.

32. **Expedite your charting**; e.g. use templates when relevant, dictation software, hire a scribe if available, and know how to use macros in your EMR.

### Time Management and Self Care

33. Work/life "harmony" doesn't necessarily equate to "balance". A good resource is the **Psychology group at USask** and their work in self-care – **Jorden Cummings PhD**.

34. There is also an interesting debate about how much administrative time should be paid for and incorporated into one's schedule. What are the institutional expectations about things that should be done on faculty's "own time" vs part of the normal workday? We pay for what we value and all of this is interesting to contemplate given the high prevalence of burnout.

35. Recognize your own **self-worth**. This is a tough job, and we need time to do it.

36. Have **self-compassion**. We can't do it all and we can't get to every task every day, and that's okay. Things that can wait, or are of low value, maybe don't need to be done at all.

37. Do **self check-ins** from time to time and pay attention to wellness; book time to look after yourself. Our productivity goes down when we are tired or get burned out so prioritize sleep and exercise, eating throughout the day, and drinking enough water.

38. Have a **supportive network** to help you. They can help you meet deadlines and share the load. This can be at a personal level but might also be something like a writing circle that helps you with your scholarship work.

39. **Monitor your use of technology** and make sure it is a tool to help you get things done and not a master of your time. Limit your screen time and consider scheduling "technology free time" for you and your family.

40. Schedule time to **do things that revitalize you**: exercising, walking in nature, journaling, reading fiction, eating well, self-reflecting and practicing gratitude. These are not "nice to have"; they can contribute to your health and happiness and prevent burnout. Schedule this time and respect it. This should be protected time that has priority and should not be sacrificed when more important things come up. Don't confuse someone's free time with their availability.

## References and Resources on Time Management

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