

# Time Management

## Five Keys to Peak Performance

by Diane M. Eade

If you could wring an extra half-hour out of each day, what would you do with the time? For the busy practitioner, the possibilities appear endless ... even if the very idea of an extra 30 minutes each day seems more like fantasy than reality. But just for a minute, imagine: what would you do with an extra half hour each day?

Okay. Time's up! Back to reality.

If you're like most practitioners, you don't have enough time to do everything you set out to do every morning. And you probably don't know anyone else who does, either. Only on rare occasions do you encounter that unusual clinician who typically outperforms all others. You watch with envy as he or she manages to juggle a heavy patient load, exercise regularly, and enjoy a great relationship and a wonderful family life.

Now you can do more than envy this clinician; you can learn the secrets to time management that will enable you to emulate his or her success.

### **TAKE STOCK**

Similar to most of your colleagues, you'd probably admit (if asked) that you:

- Work more hours now than you did 5 years ago;
- Want more leisure time; and
- Want to make more money.

Such observations are not unusual among professionals. It is from these observations that five specific life management techniques have been developed to help simplify the complexity of your daily schedule and support you in the things that really matter to you.

To get started, fill out the [questionnaire](#). Then, as you read this article, look for one specific idea that can help save you those 30 minutes a day. Realistically, that's as much as you can expect from your first attempt. You're well on your way to better planning already!

### **A PREAMBLE: TIME IS MONEY**

Before you can start on time management strategies, you need an objective measure to gauge success. In business, time is measured by its value; so let's first consider the value of your time.

Time is an interesting resource, since we each receive an equal quantity every day; also, time is perishable. Once the day ends, it is gone forever. Obviously then, the people who use time wisely have an enormous competitive advantage over others.

**How Valuable Is Your Time?**

<b>Annual Earnings</b>	<b>Each Hour Is Worth</b>	<b>Each Minute Is Worth</b>	<b>Annual Value Added</b>
\$ 30,000	\$ 16.48	\$ 0.28	\$ 728
50,000	27.47	0.46	1,196
75,000	41.21	0.69	1,794
100,000	54.96	0.92	2,392

\* From only a 10-minute improvement per day!

Classically, time is measured in dollars. For instance, consider the table above. The first two columns simply take several levels of annual income divided by 52 weeks worked each year, divided by 35 hours worked each week to determine hourly pay rates. Then that dollar amount is divided by 60 to determine the per minute pay rate in column 3. The fourth column is the most revealing. It indicates how much value is added when only 10 previously wasted minutes a day are used effectively. Just 10 wasted minutes a day for someone earning \$50,000 a year costs the employer \$1,196 annually in wasted wages. Most of us, however, shrug at this and don't feel too sorry for our employer. But what about the patients? When we allow them to wait around while we are running late, we are squandering their perishable resource and costing them and their employer money. The snowball effect can mount very quickly!

Looking at this another way, a simple 30-minute improvement in time use each day adds up to nearly 19, 7-hour days a year. Measured as vacation time and quality time with loved ones slipping through your fingers, those 30 minutes a day have new relevance to your life!

Observing the habits of those professionals who use their time more effectively than most of us reveals five key techniques that can easily be emulated. Perhaps one of these can make a difference in your life.

**ONE: ESTABLISH PERSONAL AND PRACTICE GOALS**

Highly successful practitioners live their lives on purpose. They have written, specific goals for the practice, as well as for their personal lives. Unlike workaholics, they keep their lives in balance by spending their personal time on the things that really matter to them, like their health and family. The difference between these goals and the standard New Year's resolution is that these goals are reviewed and updated at regular intervals so that the practitioner remains focused and moving in the right direction.

**TWO: ESTABLISH PRIORITIES BASED ON HIGH-PAYOFF ACTIVITIES**

Perhaps the most difficult task for most of us is to determine what is really important in terms of the "stuff" we need to do each day. So often we feel, "It's all important. I can't drop any of it!" Highly successful professionals have learned to distinguish various levels of tasks that are more worth their time than others. For instance, in a medical office, the tasks might be distinguished as follows:

**Most Important/Highest Payoff/Immediate**

Emergency surgery and procedures  
Critical analysis/diagnosis  
Critical history taking  
Critical physical exams  
Critical treatment  
High-impact patient education

**Important/High Payoff/Timely**

Routine history  
Routine diagnosis/laboratory testing  
Minor acute care  
Patient education and counseling  
Patient follow-up for chronic illness  
Preventive medicine

**Must Be Done On Time/Medium Payoff/Routine**

Prepare treatment room/supplies  
Monitor vital signs  
Conduct weigh-ins  
Sterilize instruments  
Clean up

**Less Important/Lower Payoff/Delegate**

Banking  
Bookkeeping and payroll  
Ordering supplies  
Scheduling appointments  
Writing letters  
Controlling accounts receivable  
Patient reception and handling  
Answering telephone  
Dictation and typing  
Copying

**Least Important/Low Payoff/Systematize**

Preparing Medicare or third party payer forms  
Processing mail  
Pulling and filing charts  
Miscellaneous filing  
Copying/typing

Of course, this same technique applies to your personal life.

**THREE: CREATE YOUR OWN WORK ENVIRONMENT**

Often we think we have no control over our work environment. In truth, we most often do not have absolute control, but we certainly have some influence.

Highly successful practitioners share specific behaviors. They routinely eliminate, simplify, and delegate low-payoff activities that are not worth their time. They also communicate their own priorities to the people with whom they work. This allows others to support these practitioners in their quest for effectiveness.

Time-efficient practitioners tend to keep their work space uncluttered and organized. Only one project or patient file is open at a time. This allows such clinicians to handle a variety of tasks quickly and efficiently. These providers can easily place their hands on the file they need, since their file structure is sensible and up to date. Additionally, when they are away from their work space, others can find things without assistance, saving everyone time and bother.

### **FOUR: HANDLE INTERRUPTIONS**

Interruptions are a fact of life. We cannot make them disappear. Time-wise practitioners, however, have fewer of them, and manage the remaining ones smoothly.

These clinicians have fewer interruptions because they plan better, and procrastinate less. In this way, many potential interruptions are eliminated before they arise.

Such practitioners also invest time in training their support staff to handle all the routine issues that come up. In effect, they use training as another means of planning. This is excellent for the morale and effectiveness of the support staff, and also improves the efficiency of the entire office.

Importantly, highly successful practitioners delegate both responsibility and authority. Obviously the receptionist cannot treat a myocardial infarction, but he or she can manage the calendar and return many calls, if properly trained and entrusted to do so.

### **FIVE: ENHANCE YOUR COMMUNICATION ABILITY AND STYLE**

Finally, highly effective practitioners are excellent communicators. This does not necessarily mean that they are outgoing. Instead, it means that they take a moment to listen to people and understand the heart of the matter. Then, when they speak, they get to the point and speak in easily understood terms. They stay focused on the issue, and avoid interpersonal squabbles that distract everyone from accomplishing more with less.

They have learned to say "no" so gracefully that people are not offended. After all, it's impossible to stay focused and effective when you are constantly taking care of everyone else's priorities!

### **TAKE ACTION**

The key to implementing these five steps successfully is to take baby steps; don't try to revamp your entire system in a single, massive "reorganization." Look for one idea that could save you 30 minutes a day. Then integrate it into your daily routine and monitor its repeated use (i.e., do you really use it each day?). Knowing that you just added 3 weeks to your year should keep you motivated. Then next year, pick one more idea...

### ***Clinician News Subscription Information:***

If you are interesting in subscribing to *Clinician News*, call (973) 916-0100 or e-mail [subscribe@jobsonmedical.com](mailto:subscribe@jobsonmedical.com).

© 2006 Advanced Leadership Group LLC. All rights reserved.

Advanced Leadership Group  
*The Success Builders*  
9 Appio drive  
Randolph, NJ 07869  
973 607 1889

[www.adv-leadership-grp.com](http://www.adv-leadership-grp.com)

Peak Performance Questionnaire

To determine how effectively you are using your time, respond to these questions honestly. Answer on a scale of "1 to 5", where:

**Strongly Disagree (1)**      **Disagree (2)**      **Uncertain (3)**      **Agree (4)**      **Strongly Agree (5)**

**QUESTION**

**Score 1 to 5**

- 1. I hold planning sessions with myself every day to draft the next day's "to do" list and review today's "to do" list. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. I determine which tasks are of high priority each day. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. I know how to effectively reduce and handle interruptions. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. I habitually finish all the items on my "to do" list. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. I tackle the jobs for the day in priority order. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. I delegate both authority and responsibility well. \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Total Score</b>	_____
--------------------	-------

**Evaluation of Total Score:**

28-30      Thank you for taking the time to complete our Peak Performance Self-Evaluation. The six simple questions are the very basics of good time management. You are typically a very good time manager.

Congratulate yourself! You're on your way to Peak Productivity!

Good luck in all your future endeavors!

25-27      Thank you for taking the time to complete our Peak Performance Self-Evaluation. The six simple questions are the very basics of good time management. You're doing well. With some brush up and consistent execution, you could improve even more.

Keep up the good work! With consistent attention, you are within reach of attaining Peak Performance!

19-24      Thank you for taking the time to complete our Peak Performance Self-Evaluation. The six simple questions are the very basics of good time management. You have *substantial* opportunities to improve your productivity.

It will take some work, and it will be worth the effort. Get going soon to move yourself toward Peak Performance!

## Time Management

[http://www.adv-leadership-grp.com/Time\\_Mgmt\\_Article.html](http://www.adv-leadership-grp.com/Time_Mgmt_Article.html)

16-18 Thank you for taking the time to complete our Peak Performance Self-Evaluation. The six simple questions are the very basics of good time management. You can *dramatically* increase your work performance and free up spare time for your personal life through more effective time use. Perhaps you should consider a time management program, as well as consistent use of a good day planner.

It will take some work, and it will be worth the effort. Get going soon to move yourself toward Peak Performance!

Below 16 Thank you for taking the time to complete our Peak Performance Self-Evaluation. The six simple questions are the very basics of good time management. You can *dramatically* increase your work performance and free up spare time for your personal life through more effective time use. You could benefit from a concerted effort to change your behavior with respect to your use of time. You would probably find formal training very beneficial. Perhaps you should consider a time management program, as well as consistent use of a good day planner.

It will take some work, and it will be worth the effort. Get going soon to move yourself toward Peak Performance!

© 2006 Advanced Leadership Group LLC. All rights reserved.

Advanced Leadership Group  
*The Success Builders*  
9 Appio drive  
Randolph, NJ 07869  
973 607 1889

[www.adv-leadership-grp.com](http://www.adv-leadership-grp.com)