

It is vital in any interview to avoid jargon and sounding defensive or aggressive, and to have the confidence to cease speaking when you have said what you wish.

In television it is almost as important *how* you convey a message as what you say. You must sound and look committed and enthusiastic, however difficult the interview, so that the viewer will feel confident that even if mistakes have been made something will be done to rectify it. Above all never sound complacent.

Body language is vital in colouring the message you convey to the audience. A training session will help you learn the importance of maintaining eye contact with the interviewer and the right way to sit or stand.

Time management

Fortunately for authors of articles, as with doctors in general, we are not rigidly forced to practice what we preach! Having wasted much time over the years I therefore make no claim to have emulated all of these pointers although many are being learnt the hard way or from others. Many trainees and consultants have had little management training; however, in clinical situations many time management skills such as prioritising and delegating are unwittingly employed. These skills need to be transferred to the office and in the new NHS are increasingly important.

The nature of A&E, with few fixed clinical commitments compared to other specialties, and the low ratio of consultants to junior staff, means that at least 70% of our time is spent on management tasks such as personnel, rotas, guidelines and future planning.

General principles

“Lose an hour in the morning and you will be all day hunting for it”
Richard Watley (1864)

- (1) A sometimes difficult balance has to be struck between *work, rest, and play*, not forgetting the family and domestic issues. Work must be put in the context of whole life and can be greatly affected by stress, tiredness and family worries.
- (2) Know your own tempo, work with the grain, and learn your own limitations.
- (3) Do what you enjoy and are good at when you have the choice; this should help you decide on your commitment to various options such as research, audit, special interests, teaching and so forth.
- (4) It is estimated that 20% of the effort yields 80% of the results, thus raising the question of what happens to the remaining 80% of the effort (the Pareto principle).

Know your role and work responsibility

Knowing what your job is may seem obvious but it is surprising how often we can become consumed with tasks which are not our main responsibility or even in our job description. Constantly ask yourself “What am I here for?” or “How does this task fit into my role?” and prioritise accordingly.

Analyse activity

- (1) List and rank your main responsibilities and then work out the time spent on each and if it was appropriate.

Be philosophical!

The press will not always cover a news item in the way you would like. They are there to question and to doubt the establishment, and doctors (sometimes) and managers (always) will be seen as part of this. Journalists also have to convey information on highly complex issues that can be understood by laymen. This can lead to distortion but rarely to complete inaccuracies. The motto sometimes cited for Public Relations applies equally to journalists—they tell the truth, nothing but the truth, but never the whole truth.

VICKI O’LOUGHLIN

- (2) Record *everything* you do during a day and the time taken. For each task listed ask yourself the following questions:

Was it

Necessary? that is, your role and of any worth. What if you did not do it?

Appropriate for you to do or should it have been delegated?

Efficient? Could it have been done quicker or by a better system?

These tests should be ruthlessly applied to your diary.

Identify personal goals and objectives

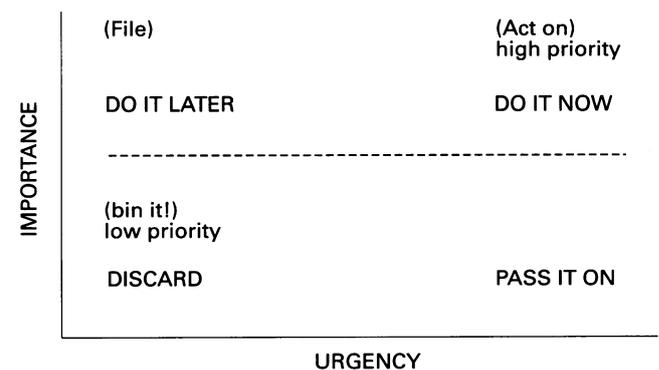
There will be some overlap with the above, but this area should include special interests/projects, areas of your department you are keen to improve, your own continuing education, or a service that you want to develop. Whether it is management training, life support teaching, or computer skills, your objectives for the time period must be listed and prioritised. Inevitably we do not allow for “unexpected” events or interruptions which must be incorporated into any plans.

Prioritise—urgency and importance

The following urgency/importance quadrants (fig 1) can be applied to tasks as well as to the paperwork on your desk.

For *urgency* consider if there is a deadline and if this is negotiable.

For *importance* consider if the task relates to your work objectives and whose needs it meets, that is, is it yours, your patients’, your staffs’, or your managers’.



Urgency/importance quadrants.

The task can then be plotted on the figure to identify your priorities. If it is urgent and important, then get moving but appreciate that it may take some time. If a task is urgent though not important, it should be done first or quickly passed on. A task which is important but not urgent, such as future staffing, should be allocated greater time and should be filed and brought forward to a space in your diary. This allows greater time for thinking, discussion, and research. If it is neither urgent nor important, then you should discard it or pass it on!

Paperwork

We spend 20 to 30 minutes a day just looking for things on or around the desk. Keeping your desk clear may be easier said than done but this ideal may be approached by following these two rules:

Rule 1: Deal with each piece of paper straight away.

Rule 2: Make one of four choices about each piece of paper: act on; file; pass on; or discard (see the figure).

Do one task at a time; much time and concentration can be lost if one is constantly distracted; a clear desk certainly helps.

Develop a filing system. You and your secretary must have a system that you both understand so that papers can be found quickly. To keep the desk clear of the "do it later" category **urgent** and **action** files can be set up at the front of the filing cabinet with headings such as *meetings, projects, correspondence, and reading*.

Delegate

As well as rating the priority of a task also ask "Is there anyone else who can do it?"

They may be able to do it better or differently from you, which can be an advantage. Tasks of high urgency but low importance are especially suitable for delegation as the person you delegate to will probably have more time and be a more appropriate grade for the task.

BLOCKS TO DELEGATION

If you feel guilty remember that the person you delegate to will generally benefit from the chance. Such thoughts as "I find it difficult to ask others" or "I can do it quicker/better myself" or "I'll get the blame" are common blocks. As a manager, however, you cannot do everything and you have to plan ahead and accept the right to delegate. Teamwork will achieve far more. Time invested initially in delegation will pay off in the long run. Your trainees and other staff have the right to gain experience as well as make mistakes; if necessary controls can be built into the job.

Having decided to delegate find the right person and delegate whole tasks, good and bad. The "contract" should include the scope of the task, what is expected, how it will be assessed, and the deadline; also the extent of any authority.

Finally **trust** people. It is surprising what people can achieve if confidence is shown in them.

Plan ahead—short and long term planning

Planning is the key to effective time management. Lists in the diary need to be made to cover daily tasks, weekly/monthly tasks, and long term objectives, all prioritised. Wall planners and personal organisers can also be put to good use. Time needs to be set aside to think about your plans and objectives. Time consuming crises can then be anticipated. Even time asleep may be useful when a problem is slept on. Avoid overplanning and make allowance for the inevitable interruptions and emergencies.

Tackle the most difficult and important tasks during your peak energy period of the day, easier or less important tasks can be dealt with during lower energy times.

"...tasks in hours of insight willed can be through hours of gloom fulfilled" *Matthew Arnold*

Time thieves—personal and external timewasters

In any day there are time wasters which need to be managed; some more easily than others!

Personal factors include:

Disorganisation—Not being prepared, searching for files, and being distracted by a cluttered desk.

Procrastination—This is not just putting things off, but knowing that they should not be put off. Try and confront *why* you are doing it and face the real issues. You may need to set yourself a deadline and reward system or get someone to check your progress. If it is a boring task break it into smaller targets and do the worse parts first. BUT get on with it!

*'Procrastination is a funny thing,
It often brings me sorrow,
But I could change that any time;
I think I will tomorrow'*

Anonymous

Not being able to say no—Sometimes we need to say no firmly but politely; if you are not firm you can lay yourself open to persuasion. It can be done without offending, such as by offering an alternative, for example, suggesting another person or a later deadline.

Motivation—Loss of interest may just be a temporary phase but if it continues consider why and if you can make changes in what you do or the way you do it.

External time wasters include:

Telephone calls—Use your secretary to screen your calls but explain clearly what you mean.

Visitors—Shut your office door if you do not want interruptions at a certain time; this is usually understood and respected. Visiting the other person's office can be quicker as it enables you to end the meeting. Standing up to greet someone who drops in and then to remain standing will shorten the visit. It is acceptable to say you are too busy and arrange another time if necessary (and the problem may have resolved itself!). Remember, talking and listening to staff is not time wasted, although seemingly unproductive.

Meetings—Only attend if you need to. Set a time limit and know what you want from the meeting or get an agenda if it is called by someone else. Avoid being side tracked. If travelling is involved consider if it could be discussed over the telephone.

Emergencies—As in clinical practice many crises are actually recurring events, some of which can be anticipated; so whether it is an airway problem or a recurring shortage of staff, try to predict it using past experience.

Mail—Act on it, file it, pass it on, or bin it as discussed above.

Summary

Establish objectives—Your work responsibilities and personal goals.

Prioritise—Use the urgency and importance scale for tasks and paper work.

Eliminate tasks—Delegate.

Plan your time—Think ahead and make lists, use your best times, manage the time thieves and the unexpected.

Adapt your clinical management skills for the office. Work smarter rather than harder!

I acknowledge the help of the Training Department, Blackberry Hill Hospital, Frenchay Trust.

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