

# Faculty Development

## Career Tools

### [Faculty Development](#)

### [On Being an Oncologist](#)

### [Future Programs](#)

### [Career Tools](#)

### [Grants & Writing](#)

### [Contact Information](#)

### Getting Organized

An e-newsletter of organizing tips for faculty members. December, 2007.

In this issue:

[New Year's Resolutions](#) :: [NAPO-Houston Organizing Seminar](#) :: [Got Clutter?](#)

*"In the absence of clearly-defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily trivia until ultimately we become enslaved by it."*

— Robert Heinlein, Author

*Manifest plainness,  
 Embrace simplicity,  
 Reduce selfishness,  
 Have few desires.*

— Lao-tzu, The Way of Lao-tzu

→ Some pages will open in a new browser window. M. D. Anderson does not endorse external sites.

The sign read "283 steps." My traveling companions and I stood outside the stairway door at the [Arc de Triumphe](#) in September, and we decided to climb to the top. All 283 steps. On a narrow, steep, spiral staircase. There is no landing along the way for you to step off and rest, and the people behind you don't really like you stopping. Once you made the commitment, you had to keep going. We all started up the steps, taking it one at a time. I had two thoughts: 1) The view better be worth it. 2) I really need to add more inclines to my workout.

This time of year is when people start thinking about setting new goals or resolutions for the coming year. Most people have vague ideas about losing weight, getting in shape, spending more time with family, paying off debt, just to name a few. By the end of January, many have abandoned their endeavors, but you can beat those odds by setting realistic goals and making a plan. "Making a decision to change just because it's New Year's Day isn't enough to keep you motivated for long," said Laura Stack, author of *Leave the Office Earlier*. "Lasting change means being prepared to make sacrifices."

**Review Last Year's Goals.** First off, Stack advocates having an annual review of your accomplishments and goals for the past year. Look back at all you have accomplished in the past year. Too often we only focus on what we didn't do.

The next step of the annual review is to take a look at your unfinished business. What were the things you meant to do, change, or accomplish by year's end that didn't get completed. Once you have your list, then you can "finish, delegate, or abandon any projects, wishes, or to-dos that have haunted you during the past year," said Stack.

**Setting Realistic Goals.** We all need goals, both short-term and long-term. Goals should be written down, and if you don't write them down, they're not real. They're just fantasies. Goals should be "ambitious but realistic," according to the book *Achieving Goals* by Kathleen Schienle. If you always wanted to be on *American Idol*, that's ambitious. However, if you have no singing

ability, you need to change your goal to something more realistic. "When you work toward a challenging goal, you feel motivated," Schienle writes. "Your effort translates into commitment and, ultimately, results."

An example of an ambitious yet realistic goal would be to run a marathon. No one can go out and run a marathon tomorrow unless they've had the proper training. That training is broken down into steps to ease you into being able to run marathon length. Some people I know started with the half marathon before attempting the full blown marathon.

**One Small Step.** Since you need to walk before you can run, you need a plan. Once you write down your goals, determine what steps you need to take to accomplish your goals. Use these steps to measure how well you're doing, and put reminders in your calendar to keep up with your goals. If you're running that marathon, the steps naturally would be the gradual increase of the number of miles you run. For those of us on that spiral staircase, we literally took one step at a time.

You can become engulfed in daily minutia and forget about your short-term and long-term goals and dreams. When your e-mail inbox is full and the phone is ringing off the hook, it's hard to remember the big picture goals you want to accomplish. It's easy to devote your time to the smaller yet demanding work competing for your attention. "When you don't plan, you end up reacting to the day's events as they occur, rather than being proactive in determining what you want to achieve," said Stack.

**Setting a Deadline.** Every step to your goal needs a deadline. Put these deadlines in your calendar. This is where most people talk about "not having enough time," and this is where most of us organized types point out that Ghandi, Martin Luther King, and Mother Theresa all had the same 24 hours in a day we all do. We do live in a different world now. "Your time is very fragmented and much of it is uncontrollable," said Stack. "The best starting place to improve your use of time is to determine the extent to which you control the time available to you."

With the time you can control, you can use a signal to show that you're busy and need to avoid interruptions, said Stack. Some people hang a sign up, wear a baseball cap, send calls to voice mail, or close their door -- if they have a door. If you're working on a big project, such as a grant, you need to go into hiding. Work from home or in the library to get some privacy. If you have staff, schedule a standard check-in time to any their questions to minimize interruptions. The important thing is communication. If you don't tell your colleagues and family that you need some time to concentrate on a project, they're not going to know what you need. Minimizing interruptions is two-way street of respect. If you don't want people interrupting you, then don't interrupt them when their signal is flying.

In addition to the yearly review, Stack also recommends a weekly and monthly review to keep yourself on target. During these reviews, she recommends reviewing your calendar and projects to determine what works needs to be completed, what deadlines are approaching, what project steps should be started, what you meetings you need to prepare for, and what items and activities were not completed.

**When Goals Change.** Change happens in life, and goals may change because of life or work happenings. For example, you are offered a new dream job in another state, become ill, have a child, or simply change course. It's perfectly okay to let go of old goals and exchange them for new ones. You have the right to change your mind and create new goals.

A new habit does take 21 days to stick. It may not seem like a long amount of time, but it's the beginning of a very big payoff for you. Accomplishing goals is not easy. It takes hard work and diligence to keep yourself on course. By focusing on the end results, it will be worth it. For me, all of those 283 steep steps were worth the views from the top.

[Back to Top](#)

### **NAPO-Houston Organizing Seminar**

A seminar on Getting Organized will be presented from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Jan. 26th at the Doubletree Downtown. The afternoon features several speakers, including yours truly, and a vendor expo. For more information, visit the website at [www.napohouston.com](http://www.napohouston.com). For those interested in the field of professional organizing, a regional conference will be held on Friday, Jan. 25 through noon on Saturday, Jan. 26th at the Doubletree Downtown. Registration information is also on the NAPO-Houston website.

[Back to Top](#)

### **Got Clutter?**

I have developed 15-minute, 30-minute and 45-minute presentations on organizing, time management, and productivity. Moving to a new building? I also have a 15-minute presentation on preparing for a move for your department. I also do one-on-one sessions in your office and help you come up with a solution to your organizing problems. To schedule a presentation or a one-on-one appointment, call (713) 792-8061 or e-mail [Janice Simon](mailto:jSimon@mdanderson.org) (jSimon@mdanderson.org).

To subscribe to this newsletter, e-mail [Janice Simon](mailto:jSimon@mdanderson.org) (jSimon@mdanderson.org).

*Happy Organizing! I wish you and your families a joyful and peaceful holiday season and a very Happy New Year!*

-- Janice

[Back to Top](#)

[Back to Previous Issues](#)

[Back to Career Tools](#)

©2008 The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center  
1515 Holcombe Blvd, Houston, TX 77030  
1-800-392-1611 (USA) / 1-713-792-6161 (5)

[Legal Statements](#) | [Become a Patient](#) | [Make a Donation](#) | [Subscribe to Newsletters](#) | 