

# Faculty Development

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## Getting Organized

An e-newsletter of organizing tips for faculty members. June, 2008.

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*Nothing is as far away as one minute ago.*

— Jim Bishop

*Time is the longest distance between two places.*

— Tennessee Williams

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Leadership gurus Bill Catlette and Richard Hadden, authors of *Contented Cows Give Better Milk*, discussed the consideration of being timely and its relationship to leadership in a recent [newsletter](#). To them, being considerate of other people's time shows good leadership. They point to Hillary Clinton's recent concession speech, where the former first lady arrived 45 minutes late. In fact, the news cameras followed as she left her house 25 minutes after the speech was supposed to have begun.

"Wasting other people's time is one of the most inconsiderate things we can do, and sadly, we do a lot of it," the authors write. "Every day, doctors, ministers, managers, airlines, and lots of others break faith with and show callous disregard for people by disrespecting their time."

Here at MD Anderson -- and I have since discovered at other institutions -- starting meetings or a function late is an all too common practice. In the clinic setting, time is affected by patient flow. If a patient arrives late or there is an emergency, the schedule is thrown off, and there's nothing you can do about it except go with the flow. For a majority of other situations, it can be managed.

"Stop assuming that your time is more valuable than anyone else's," the authors write. "It's not." Catlette and Hadden recommend to start all meetings and functions on time. "Don't punish the innocent by waiting for the guilty," they said.

One example they use is of Fed Ex founder Fred Smith, who once told three vice presidents creeping in late to his speech to leave the room. During his corporate days, Catlette himself financially punished two of his managers who arrived late at a meeting. He pulled \$25,000 out of their respective operating budgets, and they each had to pay \$500 to charity. With a fine like that, I guess you'll never be late again. In college, there was a professor who locked his door when class began. Guess how many students came on time.

Most people underestimate how long a task will take or how long it takes to walk from one building to another. This is an opportunity to research how long tasks take. Writing down the time spent can provide eye-opening data. One of my faculty clients did this during his clinic time. On his clinic schedule, he simply wrote the time he entered the exam room, the time he left, and how long he waited for the nurse. Nothing fancy, but it gave him data to use to streamline his clinic time.

For some, time is a vacuum. They say they're leaving in 10 minutes, but it's really 30 because they lose track of time. If this happens to you, use your electronic calendar or watch alarm to remind you of when to leave. Other tips to be on time for meetings and functions:

- Set the meeting time for 10 minutes before it starts.
- Schedule enough time between meetings to get to your next appointment. Some faculty set up the "45-minute" meeting to give themselves 15 minutes to prepare for the next one.
- Before leaving each day, review what meetings you have for the next day and what material you will need. After showing up on time, you also need to be prepared.
- Keep a folder for each of your regular meetings so you can grab and go.
- When you return from a meeting, immediately write down what action you need to take on your action list. Otherwise, you may forget until the next meeting.

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### **The Importance of Sleep**

Millions of people are affected by sleep deprivation, which includes those with sleep apnea issues and those who just don't get enough ZZZ's. The symptoms of sleep deprivation are daytime sleepiness, weight gain, increased appetite, little energy, impaired memory, and the inability to concentrate. "Inadequate rest impairs our ability to think, to handle stress, to maintain a healthy immune system and to moderate our emotions," said sleep-deprivation.com website. Impaired decision-making and concentration skills and low energy can affect organizing and time management skills as well. Clutter piles up since you may not have the energy to think or do anything about it.

I didn't appreciate the need for sleep until I became one of the walking dead. I was a sleep apnea zombie, going through my day in a crushing haze of exhaustion. The tipping point was the day I sent out an e-mail four times because I kept making mistakes. I could sleep 10 hours and wake up exhausted. I was gaining weight, had no energy, was tired and cranky all the time and needed a nap every afternoon. After ruling out anemia and thyroid issues, turns out my problems were caused by sleep apnea. Following a sleep study and surgery in April, I am now on the mend and have reclaimed my former addled brain.

So if you're feeling sleep deprived, how do you keep everything functioning? Here are a few tips:

- Decide what to wear to work the night before and put everything out you need to get ready.
- Write everything down in one notebook. This becomes your brain. Don't rely on your memory.
- Set reminders of your deadlines on your calendar to nudge you.
- Have someone – preferably someone who is not sleep deprived – proof any documents or important e-mails you're working on.
- Allow yourself more time to complete projects and tasks.
- Go to bed earlier. Wake up at the same time every day, even on the weekends.
- Work in a 20-minute nap in your day if possible.
- Make your bedroom as restful and clutter-free as possible.
- Try to keep up with an exercise routine. It's difficult when you only have enough energy for work and nothing leftover, but something is better than nothing.
- If your sleep deprivation persists, see your doctor.

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### **Organizing Summer Camp**

The humidity is thick in the air, the days are growing longer, and the AC is cranked higher. Ah, must be summer. So what are you doing on your summer vacation? With rising gas and airline prices, more people are opting to stick closer to home this summer for their "staycations." By spending more off time at home, many people told me they want to use the time to tackle home and work projects.

For the past couple of summers, I've had organizing clients who use the slower time for their own "organizing summer camp" to get a jump on the coming fiscal year or to catch up from a hectic fall and spring. For organizing camp, the first thing to do is make a list of all projects – organizing and other types – you want to tackle. Ask yourself:

- What do I want to accomplish?
- What mess needs to be cleaned up?
- What's unfinished?
- What do I want to let go of?
- At work, what do I need to do to prepare for the coming fiscal year?
- How can I reward myself when completed?

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### Getting Started

- Set aside blocks of time on your calendar to work on your summer camp projects.
- Although I usually recommend starting with your worst task, this is the time to do something simple and easy for your first one so you can feel successful. One client had a list of 17 organizing projects, but the first one we did was the hall closet. It was quick, easy and provided instant gratification and motivation.
- Sort and purge before buying new containers and furniture. You need to see what you have first before rushing to the stores.
- If you don't want to buy any new containers, take a look around your house and see what you can repurpose. A pretty vase can become a pen cup for your desk, or a shoebox can become a drawer divider. Be creative!

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### 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:jason@mdanderson.org) (jsimon@mdanderson.org).

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

*Happy Organizing!*

-- Janice

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