

# Faculty Development

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### Getting Organized

An e-newsletter of organizing tips for faculty members. March 2006.

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*"There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full."*

-- Henry Kissinger

*"Unless you're working in a missile silo, you don't need to check your e-mail every two minutes."*

-- Merlin Mann, Founder of [43folders.com](http://43folders.com)

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

### Myself, Interrupted

In the work place and in life, interruptions are about as common as breathing, and multi-tasking is even becoming a bad word. Interruptions have become so prevalent that people are now researching interruptions, multi-tasking, and their toll on all of us.

#### Memory, Money, Productivity

*Gloria Mark*, a researcher at the University of California at Irvine, and "interruption scientist" *Mary Czerwinski* of Microsoft Research Labs both conducted their own research projects into multi-tasking and interruptions, according to a *New York Times Magazine* article (October 2005).

Mark discovered the average office worker is interrupted every 11 minutes and takes 25 minutes to get back on the original task. Czerwinski said 40 percent of the time, we don't even return to what we were doing originally, which leads to speculation that interruptions affect our short-term memory.

In an interview in *Time* magazine (January 16, 2006), Mark and colleague *Victor Gonzalez* found that the 36 workers they studied were juggling an average of 12 projects at one time. Interruptions during work cost money and affect productivity. As many as two hours a day are lost, adding up to an estimated \$588 billion a year, according to the *Time* article.

#### The Human Factor

Interruptions are costly in other ways. In human terms, interruptions take a mental toll, setting us up to feel guilty, grumpy, overwhelmed, and inadequate. Working longer hours and giving up sleep harms us in the long run, according to *Dr. Edward Hallowell*, author of *Driven to Distraction*.

Hallowell addressed this fallout of interruptions and multi-tasking in a *Harvard Business Review* article "Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform" (January 2005). It's also the topic of his upcoming book *CrazyBusy*:

## *Overstretched, Overbooked, and About to Snap! Strategies for Coping in a World Gone ADD.*

In addition to eating a healthy, well-balanced diet, exercising, and getting plenty of sleep, Hallowell advises workers to:

- Do a task or two before opening e-mail in the morning
- Set up e-mail hours
- Get up from behind your desk every four to six hours and talk to someone you *like* face-to-face
- Take 30 minutes a day to think or meditate

When it comes to those moments of human contact and thinking time, Hallowell says it's important to turn off the cell phones and BlackBerrys – or “CrackBerrys” as he calls them.

### **Relationships as Key**

Writer *Daniel Pink* in a recent *Wired* magazine article argues we are moving away from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age, where relationships will be the key to success.

It may not feel like we're moving away from the Information Age. With interruptions being both human and technologically based, the irony is that interruptions rob us of time with our human relationships. We spend more time at the office or working at home to make up for "lost" time, setting ourselves up for failure.

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### **Techniques to Minimize Interruptions**

E-mail is not the best way to handle an emergency or something super duper time critical, and in those cases, it's best to pick up the phone. You don't want to be that person who sends an e-mail and then calls the recipient to see if they got it.

Here are some other tips:

- Turn off the e-mail alert and set regular e-mail hours  
→ Let people know that you're going to check your e-mail at certain times of the day.
- Ask your staff and others to use discretion about copying you on e-mails
- If you don't speak up, no one is going to know what you need  
→ When people come into your office, ask "Hi, what can I do for you?" This helps people get to the point.
- If someone stops by and asks if you "have a minute" and you're working on something, be honest  
→ Tell them you are busy or you can spare a few minutes. If the conversation goes longer than that, say, "This seems like it's going to take longer than a few minutes to resolve. Can we schedule another time to meet so I devote more attention to this?"
- When people come into your office, stand up so they won't sit down and make themselves at home
- Have walking meetings
- Set office hours for when staff can come in and ask you questions
- Put up a sign -- on your door or outside your office space -- that you're working on a big

project or deadline

- Set a timer for 20 minutes or so when you're working on a task  
→ See how much work you can get done on one task.
- Meet regularly with your staff and co-workers to work out shifting priorities, updated projects, and other issues
- Forward your phone to voice-mail when you're working on a project  
→ The new phones here at M. D. Anderson have Caller I.D. now so you can prioritize your calls.

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### The Candy Jar Factor

The candy jar is a delicate issue. On one hand, it's a great way to keep those important human-to-human relationships. But on the other hand, it's an open invitation for guests to stop by and chat.

If you want to keep the candy jar, put it on the edge of your desk so people can stop by with minimal interruptions, and don't be afraid to say, "I would love to chat, but I'm really in the middle of something right now."

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### Managing Paper

Every project begets a ton of paper. LaShore Page, an administrative assistant in Epidemiology, came up with a great idea of using classification folders to help Dr. Carol Etzel manage her projects.

The [classification folders](#) are divided into sections, and each section has fasteners for a two-hole punch at the top of each page. For a grant writing project, one section contained the basic information about the grant, and the other sections -- all labeled of course -- were divided up into resources, articles, and other support materials.

For papers removed frequently, LaShore uses a [two-hole punched poly retention jacket](#). The jacket fastens right into the folder. When not needed, the folders can be placed in a [box-bottom hanging file](#) in the file drawer.

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### HOT TIP: Calculating Charitable Donations

For those who itemize your taxes, the *ItsDeductible* workbook and software help determine the true "blue book" value of your charitable contributions, including clothing, cameras, furniture, computers, and appliances. The fair market values are based on data gathered by e-Bay and are updated on a regular basis.

To give an example, a pair of maternity pants in good condition could be valued at \$24. By using the system, you track your contributions throughout the year. To purchase the workbook or the online version, [visit the company's website](#).

### From the Bookshelf

*Cleaning Plain and Simple* by Donna Smallin

Donna's latest book is an answer to all of your cleaning questions. Tips range from how to remove stains from clothing, cleaning up after Fido, how to clean jewelry, and dealing with bugs.

Donna provides options on cleaning strategies for you, whether you want a daily or weekly schedule. She even includes tips on how to clean up when you have unexpected guests coming over and natural cleaning solutions for those preferring "greener" methods.

### **Got Clutter?**

I have developed 15-minute, 30-minute and 45-minute presentations on organizing and time management. 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 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).

*Happy Organizing!*

-- Janice

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