

Value Analysis & Standardization:

Systematic steps to support system-wide change

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TIME MANAGEMENT

Greetings from Carol Stone

This issue of our newsletter focuses on Time Management, an ever-present challenge for many individuals and an essential skill for the Value Analysis Professional. Your duties and constituents are many and diverse. Addressing them all within the time allotted in a normal workday is often difficult.

Inside, you'll find a variety of ideas designed to help you find the time you need in your busy time. Among them are suggestions for analyzing how you work, setting long- and short-term goals, prioritizing your workload, and dealing with vendors, colleagues, clients, and management in a way that will keep you on task, on target, and still in their good graces. We've also included a section on information overload and effective email management.

In addition, we have also included a brief reader survey. This was included in the last issue, so if you did not already respond and can find a few minutes to share your thoughts we would very much value your opinion. You can return the survey using the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Or, you can complete the survey online at <http://www.zoomerang.com/recipient/survey.zgi?p=WEB226JD2AV3AS>.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Mary Duncan-Harrison, RN, Clinical Coordinator Materials Management, St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital and Lynn Huffman, RN, MBA, Value Analysis Facilitator, Supply Chain Management, Methodist Hospital System who spent time with our writer and provided input for this issue.

As always, if you know someone else who would like to receive our newsletter, please email me at carol.stone@crbard.com and we'll add them to our mailing list.

Carol Stone
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TIME MANAGEMENT:

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Achieve the results you want in the time you have

Tempus fugit: “time flies” (or flees, to translate more accurately). It’s as true today as it was more than two thousand years ago when the Roman poet Virgil first penned this phrase. Of course, since then, the pace of life – and work – has increased exponentially, especially in this information age. Population growth alone is a major contributor; each day the world increases by more than 275,000 people. It’s a factor that permeates and dominates every aspect of our daily lives. It’s especially true for Value Analysis Professionals, whose lives affect – and are affected by – those of so many others.

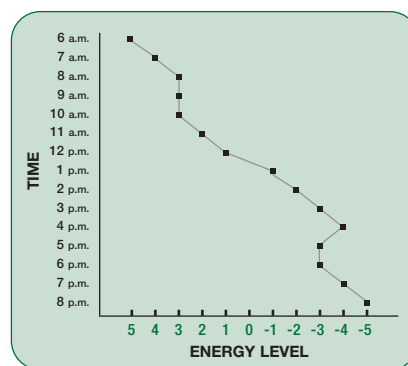
The problem, according to management guru Stephen Covey, is not so much one of managing our time but managing the activities that fill our time. And believe it or not, each of us has the ability to control how we spend the time we have: not the boss, not our colleagues, not even the president. To do so effectively, however, requires the objectivity of a third party. In other words, you must become a consultant to yourself. And then you must agree to abide by your findings.

Step 1: Analyze

According to experts, to be most effective at your job, you should spend about 60% of your time in planning and/or development, 25% of your time on ongoing projects, and 15% of your time on routine tasks. Therefore, as your own consultant, you should begin your time management project by analyzing how you currently spend your time. Over the period of a week (or month, depending on your work cycle), keep a daily log – in 15- or 30-minute increments – of how much time you spend on each activity. Be

sure to note every time you change tasks or stop, however briefly, for a phone call, email, or drop-in visit. Next, categorize each activity: as a routine task, an ongoing project, or part of planning or development. Then add up how much time you spend on each type of task, and compare your percentages to those suggested above.

Now, to maximize your efficiency, you also need to analyze your performance levels as they fluctuate throughout the day. Over the period of a week (or month), write down the times of the day when you feel most tired or alert, noting the tasks you were performing at those times. You can chart this if you like, by assigning a number between -5 (lowest energy) and 5 (highest energy), with 0 as average on your x-axis, and the hours of the day on your y-axis. Plot your energy level at each hour, connect the dots to illustrate your cycle, then analyze what it – and the chart below – say about how you are using your time. This will provide a guide to how you want to plan your activities during the day.



Step 2: Strategize

The Pareto Principle, which many of you are familiar with, states that 80% of your activities contribute to only 20% of your results. Conversely, 20% of your activities contribute to 80% of your results. Therefore, you want to be mindful of where you focus your best

time and efforts. With your job description or goals as a guideline, use your analysis from above to develop some strategies to address – or rectify – any patterns, discrepancies, or anomalies that are impeding your workday. You also need to consider how to balance projects that are part of your goals and objectives versus the “pop up” activities that end up on your desk often from your boss. For example, if you found yourself devoting too much time to routine tasks, you may decide to delegate more of them – or gang them together for handling during a low-energy time of the day. Resolve to take the time to plan your time. Brainstorm strategies with a colleague. Write down two short-term and two long-term changes you can implement immediately.

Step 3: Organize

First, you must organize your time. Write out a schedule for your day, allotting your key energy times to critical tasks. Be aware that five-minute tasks routinely take half an hour, so plan accordingly. Keep a daily to-do list and update it frequently; life requires us to be flexible. Use a day/time planner, either paper or electronic. Consult and revise it every morning. Set aside a time each day for handling emails and phone calls and keep to it unless it’s an emergency. It is tempting and often times difficult to not let emails manage you. Supplement your daily planner with a long-term planning device such as a color-coded wall chart that allows you to view your year at a glance.

Second, you need to organize your workspace. Keep your desk as clear as possible, with only the documents pertaining to your current task in view. Place pens, pencils, and other commonly used tools together in an accessible area, and frequently used files within

arms reach, but not on your desk. Use clear labels and colored file folders to reduce the time you spend looking for documents. Get a large wastebasket, position it near your desk, and use it.

Step 4: Prioritize

Prioritizing is the answer to most time management problems, according to author C. Ray Johnson. It's about making choices: of what is urgent, what is important, and what is necessary to help achieve long-term goals. Your critical tool is your daily to-do list. Study it each morning, marking each item as an "A", "B", or "C" ("A" important and urgent, "B" important or urgent, and "C" neither or routine). If some of your tasks require input from other people, hand them over to them right away. Of the remaining tasks, estimate how long it will take to complete each. Then decide how many you can fit into the time you have. Your day should include a balance of each. "C" tasks are good for low energy times. Most of your day should be devoted to "B" tasks. If you find yourself with too many "A" tasks, you should consider redefining your "A" criteria or get your boss to define his/hers. If you get a new task during the day, don't put it on your list without prioritizing it.

Step 5: Optimize

Resist the temptation: doing more is not the way to accomplishing more. Avoid multi-tasking. Focus on one task at a time, then move on. Make use of your peak energy times.

For example, begin your day by spending an hour on the most important item on your list. Make it easy to get started by breaking large projects into smaller chunks. Assess incoming documents daily, eliminating the trash and sorting as: to-do, to pay, to file or to read. And be honest about the likelihood of your ever looking at them again. Don't over schedule your day; breaks give you time to recharge. Check off your to-do tasks as you complete them; it will give you a feeling of accomplishment. And don't add a slew of items to your list at the end of the day. If a major task lands on your desk just before quitting time, make a start – and end on a high note.

Attitude is important; be willing to continually strike what's known as a dynamic bargain with yourself. In other words, accept the fact that time flies and priorities change. Agree to assess what you've accomplished – and want to accomplish – throughout the day. Then use your time management tools to adjust to new conditions as they occur. ❖

What's Your Reality?

Continued from outside.

- *Think before interrupting anyone. Their time is as valuable as yours.*
- *Make a "People" file with a page for each person you normally interact with. When you have something to tell them, jot it down on their page, then, once a day, communicate it via meeting, call, or email. (This is also useful for follow-up or documentation purposes.)*
- *Suggest your colleagues use a similar technique.*
- *Call a meeting only after considering other options, then keep it short, on time, and to the point. Consider video or teleconferences.*
- *Set aside a specific time in the day for making phone calls, be clear about the points you want to make and the time you plan to allot to each.*
- *If an incoming call is inconvenient, say so; be polite, keep it short, and ask to schedule a time to call back. Then do.*
- *Hold meetings in your colleagues' offices so you can leave when necessary.*
- *Schedule vendor meetings only on certain days of the week/month.*
- *Arrange your office so your chair is not in sight of the door. If someone interrupts, use negative body language, such as turning only your head toward them (rather than your whole body).*
- *If someone follows you into your office, do not sit down.*
- *Be aware of your boss's priorities and working pattern and plan your day accordingly.*
- *Learn to say no without actually saying "no." Use phrases such as "I'm overcommitted right now," or "Can I get back to you on that next week?" or "Do you want this to take priority over Project X?"*
- *Don't recreate the wheel; be willing to share.*
- *Always ask for deadlines, expectations and clear instructions. ❖*

10 Golden Rules of Time Management

- ◆ *Understand the value of your time.*
- ◆ *Make plans.*
- ◆ *Prioritize.*
- ◆ *List projects to do.*
- ◆ *Budget your time.*
- ◆ *Be flexible.*
- ◆ *Say no.*
- ◆ *Make use of a calendar/day planner.*
- ◆ *Abandon perfection.*
- ◆ *Delegate.*

From How To Get Organized When You Don't Have Time

5 Ways to Feel Better by the End of Each Workday

- ◆ *Don't put anything more on today's to-do list late in the day.*
- ◆ *Tackle the issues you face in descending order of importance.*
- ◆ *Work on one thing at a time.*
- ◆ *Pause periodically, if briefly, throughout the day.*
- ◆ *Acknowledge yourself for what you did accomplish.*

From The Complete Idiot's Guide to Managing Your Time

TIME MANAGEMENT:

PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Effective email management can simplify your life

Anyone with an email address has felt the frustration: the email with no subject heading, the attachments with no explanation, the endless list of addressees (of which you must be one, otherwise why are you getting this), not to mention the mounds and mounds of virtual mail awaiting you on your computer should you be away for a week or even a day.

With all your various constituents – peers, vendors, clients, management – it’s a problem particularly plaguing Value Analysis Professionals. It’s the curse of the computer, the downside of today’s knowledge-intensive society, where technology has us drowning in an onslaught of information. According to the book *The Hamster Revolution: Stop Info-Glut and Reclaim Your Life*, if you took the average “knowledge-worker” salary of \$30 per hour, sending an average of 100 emails per day, that would add up to 25 wasted days, which would mean about \$6,000 per employee per year. For every 1,000 employees at this level, a company would spend over \$6 million – just on email. You can do the rest of the math. Yet, because we don’t see those dollars being lost in a direct line item in a budget, we often look at it as the cost of doing business. One reader, the director of Contracting and Utilization Services for a health care system said, “Email is a time eater. I’ve even toyed with the idea of some days not even turning it on.”

The fact is, there’s too much information to handle and too little time to process it. Studies have shown that information overload, or IO, affects decision-making, quality of work, and job satisfaction and can lead to frustration, stress, and poor performance. It

becomes a vicious circle; IO makes us less able to function effectively, creating even more IO.

The key to breaking the circle: awareness and understanding. For the most part, say the experts, this email dilemma is a social problem. Senders are unaware of the time and effort they require from receivers when they send problem emails. Receivers, on the other hand, need to learn how to process their emails more efficiently – and to be more assertive toward senders who are taking over their agendas. Paul Corish, Director of Surgical Services for Vassar Brothers Medical Center, uses Microsoft Outlook to color code incoming emails: red for important senders (e.g. his boss), blue for hospital emails, and black for generic (i.e. “others”). Some more tips:

1 Manage your inbox
First, to minimize interruptions, turn off any automatic mail announcements. Check your email only once or twice a day – at a regularly scheduled time, for a regularly scheduled time. Scan and sort items by priority, response required, subject, or author; then remove from your inbox. If you can respond quickly and easily, do so. If your response will take longer, let the sender know. Then add the item either to your calendar or your daily to-do list. *Do not do this at your most productive time of day.* Save that time for your most challenging or creative work.

2 Consider your options
In general, email is good for communicating specific directions to your staff, general staff and organizational announcements and personalized messages. It should not be used for communicating information not relevant to all recipients,

confidential or financial issues, controversial subjects or criticism. Above all, it should not be used to avoid face-to-face discussions. Before sending an email, ask yourself whether this is the best mode of communication. If the request is urgent, send an instant message, call, or speak in person.

3 Communicate clearly
Make sure your emails are clear and succinct. Keep them short. Anything longer than one screen should be sent as an attachment. For easy reading, use short sentences and short paragraphs. State up-front the reason for your email and the action you require from the reader. Try to keep to one key point. Specify if you need a reply and when. Likewise, if you have no reply – or won’t until much later – say so in order to keep others from needlessly waiting for your response. And when responding to others’ emails, forego interspersing your comments in their original message. It risks your comments being overlooked – plus eats up the time it takes to ferret them out.

4 Form follows function
Avoid being a time waster. Address your message carefully and appropriately (To, CC, FWD) and be clear about the action required of each recipient. Always include a subject line and make sure that it describes your message or the action required. (If this is a reply or a forward, make sure your subject line is still relevant.) If you send attachments, list them in your email. If they are large attachments, send separately. And avoid attaching files when sending to discussion groups. Instead, refer them to a website. If you can, use a signature that contains appropriate and applicable contact information – in case the best response is not by email at all. ♦

SHARE *Your* VIEW

RN Joe G. is a new Value Analysis Manager who is finding it difficult to juggle all the demands of his job since taking it on. On the floor, his time was fairly well scheduled. He knew his duties, the time they would take (generally speaking), and the parties with whom he interacted. Now he's inundated with a multitude of meetings, projects, deadlines, vendors, clients, and customers and there doesn't seem to be enough hours in the day to attend to them all.

What can Joe do to make his workload more manageable?

SCENARIO 1

Joe should start work either an hour earlier or stay an hour later in order to "catch up" when there are no interruptions.

SCENARIO 2

Joe should go to his supervisor and ask him or her to prioritize his duties.

SCENARIO 3

Joe should look for a course on time management, such as those offered by professional organizations. ♦

Email your thoughts on this case to wendy.lemke@crbard.com. A sample of responses will be published in the next issue.

What's Your Reality?

Suggestions for dealing with daily issues...

"Easy enough," you say, "to tell me how to take control of my time. But how about the people I work with – or for? I can't control how effectively they manage *their* time. And how they manage their time impacts how I manage mine."

It's true. As a Value Analysis Professional, you interact with many different groups of people: peers, colleagues, clients, physicians, nurses, vendors, committee members, team members, supervisors, superiors, administrative management. You need something from them; they need something from you. And that something takes time.

As trite as it may sound, communication is key to managing your time with others. Lynn Huffman, RN, Value Analysis Facilitator, Supply Chain Management for The Methodist Hospital System in Houston, Texas, posts a copy of her weekly schedule on the wall by her door. Not only can this help keep you on track, but it's an effective way of letting others know when your time is free, limited, or unavailable. One reader, the director of Contracting and Utilization Services for a health care system employs a similar technique. Using a large whiteboard on her office wall, she marks timelines and milestones for major (and minor) projects. Anyone entering her office can see at a glance where the major demands fall on her time.

"The biggest complaint I hear is 'I don't have the time'," says Mary Duncan-Harrison, RN, Clinical Coordinator, Materials Management for St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital in Houston, Texas.

Here are some other tips for controlling your time with others:

Continued on inside.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

Often we think of time management as fitting the work we have to do into the time we have to do it. However, in order to get the most out of the time we have, it's to our own benefit that we also factor in time for ourselves.

Know Yourself

Each of us has an inner body clock that tells us when we're most alert and productive, when we're at a low ebb, and when we need to take a break and refresh. Schedule your time around your own natural rhythm. Start by making note of your energy levels during the day by writing down the times you're most creative, most energetic, most focused, most sluggish, most restless. Then, assigning each a value, ranging from +5 to -5 (with 0 as an average), create an hourly performance chart. Your peaks and valleys will pop right out. Use them as a guide when scheduling your day.

Take a Break

The average person can concentrate intensively for only about an hour without a break, so plan some in your workday to match your energy pattern. Depending on your schedule, this might include a brisk walk (either outside or down the hall), a trip to the water fountain (hydration is important; a 5% reduction can decrease mental functioning), or a relaxation/deep breathing exercise at your desk. Treat yourself well with a healthy diet and regular exercise. And don't forget to plan for vacation. In fact, you might try factoring it into your long-term annual master list – during your slowest time, in order to avoid stressing out over being away from the office. Just make sure you don't try to take it with you.

Sleep Tight

Studies indicate that most adults require around eight hours of sleep in order to function effectively the next day. Otherwise, our bodies take over with what experts call "micro-sleep," five-to-ten second episodes during which the brain is asleep even though the eyes are wide open, no matter whether we are at the computer, in a meeting, or even driving a car. The keys to a good night's sleep are many: avoid caffeine, alcohol, or heavy meals close to bedtime, sleep in a cool room, don't read or watch tv in bed, have a set bedtime (try a half hour earlier than normal) along with a relaxing wind-down routine.



SHARE YOUR VIEW...

Last issue we met Lorna M., a Value Analysis Professional who has handled standardization projects before but now is faced with one that involves her entire healthcare system. Now, as she feared, the project has bogged down because her cross-functional, multi-location team just doesn't seem to be responding.

What should Lorna do to get her project back on track?

SCENARIO 1

Lorna should hold a motivational meeting to inspire her team to pull together.

Motivational meetings are good, but first Lorna needs to look for the reasons behind her team's lackluster performance. Then, if she does decide a meeting is appropriate, it should be more than a rah-rah session, or worse, a half-hour gripe session. Refreshments, an off-site meeting location if possible, a few words from an upper-level sponsor, a review of milestones, recognition of individual or group achievements, and/or updates from team members are all potential agenda items. She might also try presenting her project as a series of major chunks, with weekly or even daily goals that can make progress and the project seem more manageable – and achievable. And don't be afraid to invoke the sponsor's name.

SCENARIO 2

Lorna should pinpoint the team members who seem to be having the most trouble meeting their project responsibilities, then meet with them individually to find out the problem.

An excellent tactic, if conducted in the proper spirit, without guilt, threats, or recriminations. Lorna's goal is to get their buy-in. Therefore, she should be prepared to help them identify their major impediments and devise a workable strategy. Note: she may find herself – or her sponsor – interceding with a supervisor if time or workload is an issue. Again, individual follow-up may be required in the form of more frequent contact or phone calls.

SCENARIO 3

Lorna might go to back to her own sponsor or supervisor for coaching or insights into issues beyond her scope.

Here's where that upper-level high-helicopter view can help. Politics, personalities, or not-yet publicized policies: a sponsor or supervisor can be a reservoir of organizational information. Likewise, he or she can suggest some resources or tactics that have proved effective in past experience. If more of these types of projects loom in the future, Lorna could also ask if a training course might be a worthwhile investment. ❖

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Comments or suggestions on newsletter format or topics of interest may be forwarded to Wendy Lemke, wendy.lemke@crbard.com or (908) 277-8491.

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