

## **Taking Control of Time**

By Nanette Miner, Ed.D.

There's never enough time in the day to do what needs to be done, that's a fact. But with a few time management techniques you can get a lot more done than your colleagues! First, let's define controlling time and managing time – because they are different. When one has *control* of their time they define when, and for what purpose, their time is used and avoid allowing others to define it for them. Managing one's time involves maximizing the limited amount of hours available to you.

Most articles you will read concentrate on managing your time, but this article will help you to *control* your time so that there are less things that need to be managed in the first place.

### **Just Say No**

One of my favorite control techniques is to just say “no.” Let's assume a departmental manager comes to you with a request for training; saying “no” can be as simple as, “That sounds like a great initiative, but I'm afraid our training calendar is maxed-out for the next quarter. Would you like to implement it later this year?” Saying no allows you to set and protect boundaries. Of course it's easier when you have an understanding of what your responsibilities are at any given time. If you didn't know that your training schedule was completely full for the next few months, you might be your training schedule was completely full for the next few months, you might be tempted to accommodate the manager's request.

But what if the request for additional training came from your boss? How do you say “no” to your boss? An effective technique is to have him/her make the decision. Say, “Here are the seven initiatives that I am focused on at the moment. Which one of these do you want me to stop working on, so that I can address this new priority?” This control technique allows you to maintain your boundaries by not taking on additional work, but rather replacing one initiative with another.

### **Set Standards**

One of the more successful ways to control your time is to develop standards which will define how you use your time. You may want to start by keeping track of how you now spend your time. It is difficult to know where you are “wasting” time, and might regain it, if you don't know where you spend it in the first place. Although this exercise is time-consuming in itself, I believe you will gain valuable insight about the way you manage your time; and you'll only need to conduct the exercise once to gain years of benefit from the insight. To analyze how you spend your time, number a legal pad in 15 minute increments, beginning at the time you start your day and ending at the time you go home. Every 15 minutes, pause for a moment to jot down what you are doing at that moment; you may be checking email, you may be on the phone, you may be designing a training program – whatever it is, make a quick note about what you're doing at that moment. Don't stop to analyze how you spend your week until the week is complete. At the end of the week, spend 20 to 30 minutes reviewing your time log and noticing any patterns. This might be easier if you color code your activities; for instance, highlighting phone calls in yellow, meetings in blue, emails in green, and the time actually spent in designing, developing, or delivering training, highlighted in a fourth color. Once you have completed an analysis of how your time is spent, you can start to develop best practices for using your time more effectively. For example, I once encouraged a Realtor-friend to use this technique and at the end of the week, when she analyzed her time, she realized that most of her day-to-day activities were very administrative in nature and didn't require her professional skills. She immediately hired an assistant who could

take care of the administrivia so that she could concentrate on serving her customers and building her referral business.

If you're ready to get more done in less time, take control. Controlling your time enables you to consistently work toward your training goals rather than allowing others to define your time and activities for you.

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Dr. Miner is the founder of the non-profit support group The Accidental Trainer; created to help all trainers who have found themselves "thrust" into the role. This article is based on ideas from her book by the same name, *The Accidental Trainer*, (c) John Wiley & Sons, Inc., (2006).