



CAME Voice/Voix

Organizational skills talk from the UofS FRCP EM Residency Program Orientation Rob Woods MD MMed FRCPC

Staying organized is crucial for success, and integrating your work with personal life will be an essential part of this. I'd like to share some tips that we share with our residents to help you become more organized and successful.

First, figure out what you want from life: don't define yourself by what you do, but why you do it and make sure this is reflected in your schedule. Steven Covey's 'Big Rocks' metaphor¹ as well as Dave Chilton's concept of 'paying yourself first'² are good concepts to use when figuring out what you want from life.

Make sure you align your work activities with your goals: take on new things ONLY if they satisfy at least 2 of the following criteria:

1. You're excited about it and it fits with your priorities
2. It is important – to the earth, humanity, your patients, you, or your career
3. You are rewarded well – either financially or in another way.

Know your priorities: to be successful, you want to stay ahead of deadlines and focus on things that are important, but non-urgent, so you can minimize the time you spend putting out fires. Scheduling time to schedule will help; have a scheduling day every month where you 'catch up' on all of those regular maintenance tasks including those associated with your work, academic activities, personal and practical stuff (such as child care, birthdays and anniversaries, and paying bills), and day-to-day logistics (such as filing, contact lists, and managing your CV).

Avoid the urge to multi-task or 'attend to multiple tasks' as it is too energy consuming: either stay on task, or let your mind wander. Daniel Levitan³ describes our having 2 modes: Daydreaming (default) and Central Executive. It takes a lot of metabolic energy to switch between them. The Central Executive mode allows you to focus and complete a task, but attending to multiple tasks keeps us from getting a single important task done. Checking email, or text gives us burst of endorphins, albeit short lived; much like a sugary snack, but in the long run, it's not good for you. Make sure that you give yourself daydreaming time to allow you to make connections between previously separate ideas. When new ideas come to you, simply write them down and keep daydreaming.

1. http://www.appleseeds.org/big-rocks_covey.htm
2. Chilton D. The Wealthy Barber: The Common Sense Guide to Successful Financial Planning. Toronto: Stoddart. 1989
3. Levitan D. Organized Mind. Penguin Books NY, NY 2014

See also Patel H, Puddester D. The time management guide: a practical handbook for physicians by physicians. Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada 2012