

Time Management

Good time management makes the difference between being effective at what you do and simply burning out, says Caroline Johnson. By taking note of the following tips you should be able to use your time more efficiently and more productively.

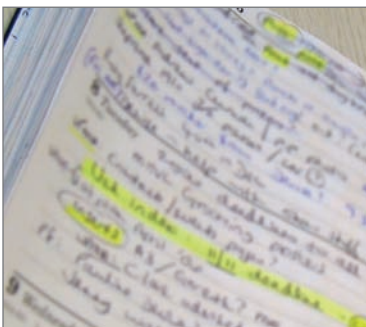
Veterinary practice management carries a broad remit covering such areas as health and safety, buying, building maintenance, marketing and human resources. In terms of task juggling, what job could possibly demand more?

1. 'To Do' lists

Always start the day with a 'To Do' list that consists of activities requiring completion during the next twenty-four hours. The secret of making this work well is to highlight only those activities that are both important and urgent and to tackle these first. Items may be carried over to the next day's list, but they should be deleted if they keep re-appearing. If they have not been completed then they cannot be "important and urgent" and probably don't need your attention at all!

2. Meetings

Far too much time is spent unproductively in meetings. Ask, is this meeting really necessary or can



we achieve what we need to in other more time-efficient ways? Where meetings are required make sure that you always agree objectives beforehand, an agenda is drawn up, you complete on time and that action points arise from the meeting. Whilst brainstorming has a place, most meetings to 'discuss ideas' are usually a waste of

time. Be focused: agree objectives before and actions after.

3. E-mails

Electronic mail can be the biggest time waster of all! Too many of us spend hours every day simply responding to e-mails. Be disciplined. Use electronic mail only where it is needed and copy in only those who need to know – not the world and his wife! Respond to those e-mails that absolutely must have a response; ignore the rest. Be aware of the danger of generating never-ending e-mail conversations.

4. Time out!

Ensure that you allow yourself some 'me time' in order to complete important tasks and to catch up once in a while. The following will help:

Inform colleagues that when a red card is hung on your door then it means 'Do Not Disturb' – except in the case of a very real emergency. Use the card sparingly for when you must have peace to complete a task.

Never fill more than 75% of your diary, leaving at least one quarter of your time available for uncompleted tasks – you'll need it.

5. Office Feng Shui!

If you find yourself continually disturbed by people popping in to your office for a chat or that colleagues keep dumping tasks on you, rearrange your furniture in



ways which will help you maintain control:

Move your desk so that your back faces the door. When people see you working they are less likely to disturb you than if eye contact can be readily made.

Place a spare chair in your office but leave a briefcase or pile of papers on it. This means that most visitors will remain standing and therefore will say what they need to say and go. The chair can always be cleared when you want someone to stay for longer!

6. Practice saying "No!"

Busy people tend to find that others expect increasingly more from them and the work just keeps on coming their way. To control this, simply practice saying "no" in a polite but firm manner; it's incredibly powerful. Do not negotiate. Do not explain. Do not discuss. Simply say "sorry...but no!"

These techniques should be used to ensure that you remain focused on the activities that clearly fall within your remit and which are important for the success of the entire practice team.