Recently, I was given a hard deadline that I was required to meet. During the time I had to meet my deadline, I wasn’t fully present and not able to focus at meetings. I was thinking of what needed to be done and my stress level increased. Not only did I not meet my deadline, I was frustrated and exhausted. It was at this point that I realized I needed to reassess and brush up on my time management strategies. I am assuming you all can relate and have had this same experience at one time or another. In the home visiting field, this is a very popular topic, everyone has so much to do in which feels like so little time. What does that look like for you when you are working with families? When you are feeling overwhelmed, unorganized, and your “to do” list is growing?

I pulled out my time management resources and would like to share a few strategies that can be helpful. Mastering time management does more than just increase productivity. When time is managed wisely, it minimizes stress and improves the overall quality of your life. First of all, there are a lot of things that make it difficult for us to manage our time effectively. Recognize that obstacles exist, identify them, and employ strategies to help overcome them.

Let’s consider these six strategies and see if we can apply any of them:
• Develop and set clear goals daily, weekly, and monthly. Aligning and tracking goals through actions and results are critical for success. Closely tie your goal to your organization’s overall strategy.

• Taking an organized approach helps to prioritize and manage tasks through planning and detail. Rank tasks according to importance or urgency to plan your day and focus your mind.

• Dedicate time blocks for data entry, phone calls, reading and answering emails—blocking an hour a day or 30 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes at the end of each day will reduce the pressure of responding to emails while focusing on other tasks. Also, gives you permission not to be connected to the Internet every hour of the day.

• Interruptions – Many times we are in the middle of accomplishing something really important and someone interrupts you. This not only takes you away from your task but sometimes they interrupt your train of thought and you can’t return to where you were without retracing your steps. More interruptions – we all like to visit with others, but conversations at inappropriate times can cost us time when we have to stop what we are doing and redirect ourselves from our plans. If you share an office, wear earbuds to help focus on the task at hand. Talk to your co-workers on how they can support you.

• Periods of inactivity – As much as we think we are busy, there are times in our day when we are not really doing anything. Recognizing and making use of these times can have a positive effect on our efforts. Make good use of your “waiting time”. When you get notice of a cancelled meeting or home visit, how can you use that time to “catch up” on other tasks?

• Self-care is an important part of time management. Everyone experiences stress from time to time, and sometimes we actually operate a little better when there is some level of stress. Too much stress, on the other hand, causes our work to suffer and wears us down physically and mentally. Schedule in daily breaks to connect with co-workers, go out to lunch, talk a walk, read a book, listen to music.

If you can manage your time more effectively, you will be more efficient in serving your families and will be able to support your families better. On a personal level, you will certainly feel healthier, more energetic, and in a generally good mood.

At the end of the day, no matter how tight your schedule looks, your time is well spent in supporting families of New Mexico. Time management is about being present and connected to doing one thing at a time, with all your energy, your attention, your heart. Try not to let time pressures take away your passion for the work that you do!
Questions to encourage discussion and reflection…

- What are your time management patterns? What are some time management strategies that are working?
- Did you start your day with a clear plan on how you would use your time during the day? Identify and evaluate how you are currently spending your work time.
- What interruptions and time-wasters did you encounter? How could you have avoided these time-intrusions?
- During staff meetings share strategies with your team, most likely someone has discovered a new method to stay on task.
- What is your role as a home visitor? Are you spending extra time on case management or research? Do you need to re-orient families on your role? Can you benefit from learning more about time management?

References/Additional Resources


Assessing Home Visiting Program Quality. Final Report to the Pew Center June 2012