USING YOUR TIME WISELY TO ACHIEVE YOUR CAREER GOALS:
STRATEGICALLY SAYING YES AND NO

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Outline

- Time management tips from literature

- Time management tips from my own experience
  - When to say yes/no
  - How to say no
  - Examples
Time management tips from literature

- Time management strategies fall into 4 distinct principles
  - Setting short and long-term goals
  - Setting priorities among competing responsibilities
  - Planning and organizing activities
  - Minimizing ‘time wasters’

Career Goals

- Set short-term and long-term career goals
  - Set intermediary steps on the way to long-term goals
  - Do not let long-term goals be dominated by more urgent short-term time demands
- Always evaluate demands on your time with respect to these goals

Prioritize

- Categorize tasks into 4 “buckets”
  1. Important and Urgent
  2. Important and Less urgent
  3. Less important and Urgent
  4. Less important and Less urgent

- Should spend most of your time on categories I and II

- Important to devote time to category II
  - Frequently avoided until task moves to category I

Planning and Organization

- To-do lists
- Weekly and monthly schedule more effective than one-day task list for long term goals
- Sort tasks by size
  - Large (> 1 hour)
  - Medium (30 to 60 minutes)
  - Small (5 – 10 minutes)
  - Very small (< 5 minutes)
- Select the best time to tackle each task
  - Best time is likely to depend on task size

Minimizing Time Wasters

- Avoid distractions, especially when tackling “large” tasks
  - Physical interruptions
  - Technology interruptions
- Find best time and place to minimize distractions

Josée’s time management tips

- Always evaluate demands on your time with respect to career goals
- When considering a new demand on your time, take an honest look at your calendar
  - If the task does not fit in your calendar, make room or say ‘no’
- Select the best time to tackle each task
Josée’s decision tree

How long will it take?

< 5 min

Do it!

> 5 min

Will it help reach career goals?

Yes

Estimate time commitment then double your estimate (or include a wide confidence interval)

No

Consider declining

Take honest look at your calendar before accepting
Five-Minute Tasks

- May not see immediate benefit, but accumulation of these 5 minute tasks will pay off
  - Keep a list of 5-minute tasks as “filler”
    - Waiting for meetings, patients, students, kids
  - A favor often attracts another
  - Being a “good citizen” often pays off in the long run
Help Reach Career Goals?

- Very loosely defined

  - Could have direct benefits
    - Invited talk at a national meeting will increase your visibility and visibility of your department/school/university
    - Joining a research team leads to publication, grants, etc.

  - Could have potential/indirect benefits
    - Networking event where you may or may not meet people who will help advance your career
    - Opportunity to develop new skills
Benefit Others?

- Some tasks may not benefit you, but may benefit others
  - Examples: extra teaching, mentoring

- My rule of thumb
  - If it will take < 1 day and I will enjoy doing it, I will not say no automatically
    - Take into consideration how busy I am, if there is someone else available who could do it better, etc.
  - If it will take > 1 day and will not help reach my career goals, I tend to decline
Other considerations

- Is now the right time?
  - Will the opportunity be available in the future?
  - Will I gain greater benefits from saying ‘yes’ in a few weeks/months/years?
- Is there someone else available?
  - Do I bring unique skills to the task?
  - Could someone else perform the task?
Other considerations

- Of course, who is asking will influence your answer
  - Not explicitly stated in Josée’s decision tree
  - Included under “help reach career goals”
    - Doing a favor for someone who can help you reach your career goals is beneficial to your career, even if the task itself is not
How to say no*

- Acknowledge the person and his or her interest in engaging you.
- Identify the importance of the task.
- State with regret that you cannot do the task asked of you.
- Wrap up with a positive wish for success. You may offer suggestions of an idea or another person to help if doing so does not distract you from your priorities.

*Borrowed with permission from N. Karl Haden, President and CEO of Academic of Academic Leadership.
How to say no

- If possible, suggest someone else who could do the task
  - I am not available, but I think Dr. X would do a great job
  - This includes invitations to be a referee from ‘legitimate’ journals. The person soliciting a review may be asked to write a letter of recommendation for you some day, or be on a committee deciding on an award for which you are a nominee!

- If the time is not right, say ‘no, not now’ instead of ‘no’
  - You can negotiate for more time
    - E.g. Cannot do this in the next week, but could do it next month
  - Give an indication on when you think would be a good time or simply say “please keep me in mind for future opportunities’
Select the best time to tackle each task

- Very small tasks (< 5 min) can be used as filler
  - Waiting for meetings, patients, students, kids

- Large tasks (> 1 hour) may be best done when there are no distractions
  - E.g. I do most of my writing very early in the morning, when I am the only person in the office

- If a task requires a lot of concentration, reserve for time of day when you function best
  - E.g. I reserve most of my writing tasks for morning, when I think most clearly
  - E.g. I avoid scheduling meetings before 10am so that I can use morning time most efficiently

- Put all tasks in your calendar, including blocks of time to work on long-term goals
  - When accepting a task, look at calendar and block time to perform task
    - E.g. Paper review, grant review, etc.
Examples

- Guest lecture in a course
- Serving on a committee
- Leading a task force
- Serving on a study section
- Writing a review article
- Associate Editor of a journal
- Other examples?