A Professional Growth Module:

TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS
TIME: SPEND IT WISELY!

Have you ever heard the expression, “You have to spend money to make money”? Well, the same is true with time. You have to spend time to make time.

In other words, if you spend a little bit of time every day to get yourself organized by making a “to-do” list with priorities and goals, you will actually save yourself time throughout the day.

And, if you spend time focusing on each task as you do it, you will avoid mistakes . . . and the time it takes to fix those mistakes!

By planning ahead, you give yourself the BIG PICTURE of what your day looks like. You can make decisions about what actually needs to get done and what can wait.

We live such complicated, hectic lives. Our "to-do" lists seem to get longer every day. And, with all these commitments and obligations comes an increased level of STRESS!

Understanding the principles of time management will help you simplify your busy life. You can get a handle on all the tasks you want to do and all the tasks you have to do throughout the day. You’ll be left feeling calmer and less stressed at the end of the day!

In this inservice, you will learn how to stay organized, reduce your stress level and actually accomplish more!

You will learn that planning a bit, eliminating time wasters, and giving your full attention to the task at hand will actually leave you with more time in your day to do the things that are important to you!
WHERE DOES THE TIME GO?

- If through the years, you perform an activity for just thirty minutes every day, it will end up taking a solid year of your life.
- Have you ever said, “I’ll be with you in a jiffy”? Did you know that a “jiffy” is an actual unit of time? It’s the same as 1/100th of a second!
- If you add up all the TV watched every year by the average American, it would equal one straight month—24 hours a day!
- By age six, most children spend more time watching TV than they will spend talking to their fathers in their whole lives.
- There are 31,557,600 seconds in a year.
- Over a lifetime, most people spend a total of 16 years working, 15 years sleeping, 6 years watching TV and 3 years eating.
- More words are published every day than any person could have time to read in a lifetime.
- There is an actual law in Iowa that says that kisses may last for as much as, but no more than, five minutes.
- Americans are spending more time at work now than they did ten years ago...and much more time than they did twenty years ago.
- When people waste time, it’s a choice they are making. In high school, actor Robin Williams wasted so much time that he was voted the “Least Likely to Succeed.” But, look at him now!
- You’ll never be younger than you are right now!

“I am definitely going to take a course on time management...just as soon as I can work it into my schedule.” ~ Louis E. Boone

As you read through this inservice, you will learn some tricks that may actually help you “find” more time in your day to do the things YOU want to do!

- When you come across an idea that you can use to make your personal and professional life run more smoothly, come back to this page and write it down so you can remember—and apply it later!
BREAK THE MULTI-TASKING HABIT

Do you ever feel like a juggler, desperately keeping all the balls in the air?

Since the mid 90’s, we’ve been told that in order to be good at what we do, we have to be able to juggle many things at once. In other words . . . multi-task.

Multi-tasking is doing more than one thing at a time. Sounds like a great way to cram more into your day, right? You can put your make-up on in the car while you drive to work . . . you can return a call to your child’s school when you sit down to do your charting.

While it may seem like you are managing your time well by doing several things at once, the truth is multi-tasking may be costing you more time than it is saving.

- Studies show that people who think they’re saving time by performing several tasks at once may not accomplish anything as well—or as fast—as if they tackled one task at a time.
- It has been shown that the time it takes to decide to switch tasks, stop work on one activity, and get up to speed on the next can make each task take two to four times longer.
- Brain-scan studies have shown that doing two things at once cuts the brainpower available for both tasks in half.
- Multitasking increases the level of stress hormones in the body, which can affect memory.
- Multi-tasking can be dangerous, and mistakes can be serious, especially in health care.

BREAK THE HABIT!

Most healthcare workers are in the habit of multi-tasking. Your training probably even included lessons in how to take care of many things all at once.

Sometimes multi-tasking is unavoidable. But, you don’t have to do it all day long!

Multi-tasking increases your chances of making mistakes. And, mistakes in healthcare can hurt people. Mistakes can even be deadly.

The most efficient nursing assistant knows how to give full attention to the task at hand. That means:

- When you are giving care to a client, you are present with the client.
- You begin and end the task completely before moving on to another task.
- You keep your mind focused on the client you are caring for at the time because even thinking about your next task takes your concentration away from what you are doing in the present.

DEFINITION

Multi-tasking: The art of screwing everything up simultaneously!
~Author Unknown

It may seem like it would take MORE time to work this way . . . but in reality it takes less time. When you tackle one task at a time and complete it thoroughly before moving to the next task, you will find it takes less time to complete the task. This leaves you more time to do everything else on your list!
THE PROBLEM WITH PROCRASTINATION!

"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."
~ William Penn

Procrastination is when people put things off—especially things they don’t like to do. Many people procrastinate until the very last minute and then end up with a huge job on their hands. For example, have you ever put off doing required paperwork and ended up having a huge pile to finish? Or, have you ever waited to wash dishes until there were no more clean dishes at all?

There is a saying: **Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.** This is good advice, since procrastination is a real time waster—and a bad habit. Here are some ways that people procrastinate:

**TOO MUCH PLANNING, NOT ENOUGH ACTION!**

- **Example:** Susan spends so much time cutting out recipes and planning what she wants to cook that she never has time to cook. She ends up going out to eat instead—even though she can’t really afford it.

- **Solution:** Susan could set a time limit for her menu planning. She could schedule an hour every weekend to look through recipes and plan meals for the week. Then, she should buy the ingredients so that she has no excuse not to cook.

**AVOIDING BORING TASKS.**

- **Example:** Tom finds it really boring to fold his client’s laundry. He tends to put off the job, leaving the laundry in a heap until it gets wrinkled. Family members have started to complain, so now his supervisor is unhappy with him—all because of some laundry!

- **Solution:** Tom could alternate boring tasks with ones that are more interesting. The interesting tasks can be like a “reward” for completing the boring ones.

**PUTTING OFF THE UNPLEASANT.**

- **Example:** Lydia finds it hard to get along with one of her clients, an elderly woman named Mrs. Jones. She puts off taking care of Mrs. Jones until late in the day. But by then, both Lydia and her client are tired. This means that it takes longer than it should to finish Mrs. Jones’ personal care and the client is even grumpier than usual.

- **Solution:** Lydia could ask Mrs. Jones what time of day she would like her personal care—and then do it at that time. This might make Mrs. Jones easier to get along with. Or, Lydia can plan to do Mrs. Jones’ care first thing in the morning. This way, Lydia’s least favorite task is finished early and she doesn’t have to worry about it all day.

**UNREALISTIC DEADLINES.**

- **Example:** Bill tends to work slowly every morning, taking several breaks and taking time out to talk to coworkers. After lunch, when Bill feels that time is running out, he speeds up, rushing through his work to get it all done by the end of the day.

- **Solution:** Bill can set up “mini” deadlines for himself. He can divide his work into fourths and tell himself that he needs to finish one fourth by 10:00, another fourth by 12:00 and so on. Until this new way of working becomes a habit, Bill could ask his supervisor or a coworker to check if he’s meeting his mini deadlines.
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SOME COMMON TIME WASTERS!

INTERRUPTIONS
Interruptions in your day can cause you to waste a lot of time and keep you from getting your work done on time.

Remember, there will always be things that change the way your day is going, such as: accidents and emergencies, new client assignments, staff meetings, picking up the slack for coworkers who are out sick, and problems with equipment.

You need to learn how to manage these unpredictable events without letting them “screw up” your whole day.

- Example: Cynthia is a home health aide. When she gets to Mrs. Johnson’s house, she finds that the client’s wheelchair is broken. Cynthia can’t get Mrs. Johnson out of bed without it. A family member takes the chair to be fixed while Cynthia waits at the house for over two hours. Now, Cynthia is really late for her other clients and has a hard time catching up.

- Solution: The first thing Cynthia should have done is call her supervisor. Perhaps there is another way to get the chair fixed besides having the family member gone for several hours. Or, if the client is able to be left alone, Cynthia could visit another client or two and come back to Mrs. Johnson’s house after the chair is fixed. If not, perhaps Cynthia’s supervisor can reassign some of her clients to other aides.

TAKING SHORTCUTS
Taking shortcuts can be a big waste of time. In fact, they can end up causing tasks to take more time instead of less!

- Example: Melinda wanted to save time during bath time so she was using bar soap to wash her client’s hair. But, the bar soap caused her client to develop a severely dry scalp. Now, Melinda has been ordered to use a special shampoo every day and to brush her client’s hair with a special brush. This process takes her twice as long as before.

- Solution: Melinda could easily have set up her bath supplies so that the regular shampoo was handy. Taking a few seconds to put down the bar soap and squeeze out some regular shampoo would have saved her lots of time in the end—and given her client better care.

PERFECTIONISM
Perfectionism is the desire to be perfect all the time. As health care workers, it’s important to do your best. Clients depend on you for quality care, and sometimes it can mean life or death to them. So, trying to be perfect in your work is not a bad thing, unless it “takes over” and begins to waste your time.

- Example: Marvin is an excellent nursing assistant who tries very hard to be perfect in everything he does. Lately, he has become especially worried about making a mistake and is taking longer and longer to finish his work. For example, to get towels folded perfectly, he sometimes unfolds and refolds them several times. And, to make sure his documentation is perfect, he reads over what he has written three times.

- Solution: Marvin needs to do two things. First, he needs to have more faith in his skills. He is an excellent nursing assistant and needs to have faith that he will do something right the first time. Second, Marvin needs to set some priorities in his work. Instead of trying to be perfect in every task, he needs to decide which ones are worth the time. For example, refolding towels until they are perfectly folded is a big waste of time! Marvin should “save” his perfectionism for tasks that are really important. (Remember: mistakes are opportunities for learning! No one can be perfect all the time.)
MORE TIME WASTERS!

LACK OF FOCUS

Bouncing from one task to another without really finishing anything can eat up a lot of time. This often happens to people who are easily distracted—often finding themselves going in two directions at once.

- **Example:** Steve is a “bouncer”, constantly moving from task to task. But, he doesn’t really finish anything. Steve gets bored very easily and is happy when a coworker or family member interrupts his work. He likes to do things differently every day. His supervisor hasn’t really noticed the problem because Steve always looks busy. But his coworkers end up having to help him finish his work nearly every day.

- **Solution:** Steve needs to set some basic goals—and stick to them. If he gets bored, he should ask his supervisor if he can switch his client assignment or complete his tasks in a different order on some days. Steve might benefit from a daily To Do list, checking tasks off as he completes them. Steve needs to remember that staying busy is not the same as getting things done. His coworkers shouldn’t help him if it means they can’t get their own work done. Steve needs to learn to complete his own work.

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE

A negative attitude can really waste time—and energy.

- **Example:** Sheila doesn’t really like her supervisor. She spends a lot of time trying to avoid her and when they do meet up, Sheila only pretends to listen to what her boss has to say. Sheila uses up precious time every day complaining to coworkers, clients and family members about her boss. She ends up having to work late or goes home without finishing her work. Sheila’s job is on the line.

- **Solution:** Think of all the time Sheila is wasting on being negative. She probably goes home and spends more time complaining to her family about her boss. And, her negative attitude may end up getting her fired! Sheila has two main choices: One, she can find another job with a supervisor she likes. But, chances are, Sheila will take her negative attitude with her to her next job. Or, two, Sheila can decide to change her attitude. She could sit down with her supervisor and try to talk about what’s bothering her. Or, she could stop focusing on her boss and pay more attention to her clients and her work. Either way, she would probably end up with a more positive attitude and with more control over her time.

Take a moment to reflect on what you’ve learned so far.

- Did you recognize yourself in any of the “Time Waster” examples?
- How do you waste time at work and at home?
- How can you eliminate the time wasters in your life?
YOU DO THE MATH!

Do you know what your time at work is worth? Here’s an example:

Mary makes $12.00 an hour as a nursing assistant. She works eight hours every day. So what is Mary’s time at work worth?

- **Every day is worth 96 dollars.**
- **Every hour is worth 12 dollars.**
- **Every minute is worth 20 cents.**

Okay, so *every minute* Mary spends at work is worth 20 cents. Let’s say she spends 15 minutes every day making personal phone calls. In a year, she will have spent $780.00 worth of time making those calls.

Or, what if Mary wastes 30 minutes every day by trying to be *too* perfect. In a year, this means she will have wasted $1560.00 worth of time.

Studies have shown that the average American actually works only 6 hours of each 8 hour day. The rest of the time is wasted! Why? Those same studies say that people waste time because:

- They are too tired to get through their work.
- They get involved with personal matters at work.
- They aren’t organized.
- Or, they spend too much time socializing.

If Mary actually worked only 6 hours every day, that would mean that in a year, she would waste $6,240.00. Let’s say that Mary has 25 coworkers who also make $12.00/hour. If those coworkers also waste two hours every day, Mary’s workplace will lose nearly $156,000.00 every year in wasted time!

Some people might say, “So what? My workplace makes lots of money. They won’t miss $156,000.” But that would be wrong. The more money a workplace loses, the less it has for employee raises or improving working conditions! So, people who waste time at work are hurting themselves in the long run.

TIME IS MONEY: HOW MUCH IS YOUR TIME WORTH?

As you go through your work day, remember what each minute of *your* time is worth.

To make the most of your time, try asking yourself the following questions:

Do I know what is expected of me on the job?

- YES
- NO

Do I have all the tools I need to do my job?

- YES
- NO

Do I know who to go to if I need help with my work?

- YES
- NO

Do I know that I am doing a *good* job?

- YES
- NO

Am I using all of my strengths and skills?

- YES
- NO

Do I know what to do if I finish all my work before the end of the day?

- YES
- NO

To really manage your time well, you should be able to answer “**yes**” to all the above questions.

*If you answer “no” to any of these questions, discuss the issue with your supervisor.*
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GOALS AND LISTS AND PRIORITIES . . . OH MY!

THE VALUE OF GOAL SETTING

People who set goals are able to see what they have done and are able to feel proud of their accomplishments.

Example: Jill is a home health aide who has trouble managing her time. She visits 6 clients every day and must turn in her paperwork on Fridays. She never finishes her visits on time and usually ignores her paperwork all week. Then, she works late every Friday to finish it. She's stressed and her husband is complaining about her late Fridays.

Solution: Jill needs to set some goals for herself. These goals might be:

- I will complete three client visits before lunch.
- I will complete the next three before 4pm.
- I will finish my paperwork between 4 and 5pm.

Then, if Jill has trouble finishing her visits, she should ask herself why. And, she should stick to her goal of finishing her paperwork each day—even if it means working late for a few minutes. (It’s better to work 10 extra minutes every day than to have to work an extra hour on Fridays!) By setting morning and afternoon goals for herself, Jill will finish her work on time most days—and feel less stressed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF “TO DO” LISTS

To Do lists are lists of tasks that need to be done in order to reach your goals. It’s a way of organizing and planning your time so that you get important things done in a certain amount of time. Think about this: Have you ever made a list of Christmas presents you have to buy for friends and family? That’s a To Do list. It’s a list of gifts you have to get by a certain time...before Christmas. To Do lists can be great tools in your personal life and at work.

Example: Donald is a new nursing assistant and he has trouble knowing what to do first at work. He ends up wasting time on minor tasks while letting the important tasks slide.

Solution: Donald should sit down with his supervisor or an experienced coworker. Together, they should make a list of all the tasks that Donald is supposed to finish in one day. Then, they need to organize the list according to what is most important (like client care) and what needs to be done at a certain time (like passing out lunch trays). Once Donald has learned the basics, he might want to make a To Do list every time his client assignment changes.

THE PURPOSE OF PRIORITIES

A priority is something that is more important to you than anything else. For example, as a healthcare worker, keeping your clients safe is a big priority. Getting your work done on time is another priority. The problem is, you can only have one top priority at a time!

Example: John works in an assisted living facility. John has three different client issues happening at the same time:

- Mrs. Smith needs John’s help to find her glasses right now!
- Mr. Jones looks like he’s about to fall.
- Mr. Brown, a client with early Alzheimer’s Disease, wandering down the hall, looking lost.

Solution: John can only have one top priority. What should it be? His first priority is to go help Mr. Jones before he falls down. Once John has Mr. Jones settled and safe, what should his new top priority be? He needs to check on Mr. Brown since he may be having trouble finding his room, and might wander off. The least important thing is to find Mrs. Smith’s glasses—even though she thinks it’s an emergency. John will help her as soon as he can, but it can’t be his first priority!

HINT: Be sure you understand what your priorities are—and make sure that they match your supervisor’s idea of what is most important. Each day, the order of your tasks may change based on split second decisions you make about what is most important. Be prepared to make those priority decisions—keeping your clients in mind at all times.
NO EXCUSES - JUST DO IT!

It’s pretty common for people to put off tasks that they don’t like to do or that are especially unpleasant. A great tip for saving time is to do these kinds of tasks first.

It’s called the “worst first” strategy. This means that you deal with those unpleasant tasks right away—instead of wasting time worrying about them.

Remember that unpleasant tasks often become more unpleasant the longer you wait!

Example: Mabel is supposed to wake up one of her clients and turn him in bed every four hours. She hates to do it because the client, Mr. Avery, is rather grumpy. Mabel puts it off, and usually only turns him once in eight hours. Mr. Avery ends up with a bed sore. Now, Mabel has to turn him every two hours! Her unpleasant task just got worse, and the client suffered for it.

Solution: Mabel should try the “worst first” strategy. By jumping in and turning Mr. Avery on schedule, she could avoid causing him a painful bed sore and may find that the task isn’t that bad after all.

HINT: Try focusing on the results of an unpleasant task. For example, Mabel could think about the positive results of turning Mr. Avery on schedule:

1. Mr. Avery will be more comfortable in the long run.
2. She will be helping Mr. Avery avoid skin breakdown.
3. She can feel proud of a job well done!

GET CREATIVE: Think of 3 creative solutions to this problem that will help you get out on time and still meet your client’s needs.

TALK ABOUT IT: Share your ideas with your co-workers and supervisor and find out how they would solve the problem.
TIME MANAGEMENT IN THE HOME SETTING

Caring for clients in the home presents a whole set of unique challenges for the nursing assistant. Not only are you caring for the client who may be ill or injured, but you are also caring (to a lesser degree) for the other family members and for the home.

As you begin a new home health assignment, make a list of all the tasks you are expected to perform, such as laundry, preparing meals, general housekeeping, and bathing and caring for the client. Then schedule the tasks in blocks of time throughout the week (see sample schedule below).

Try to stick to your schedule the best you can but ALWAYS leave room for interruptions or unexpected events!

WORK EFFICIENTLY

- Organize the supplies you need for each task in a place that is convenient for the task. For example, if your client needs a dry dressing change each day, assemble a small basket with the dressing, tape, scissors and any other supplies you might need for the dressing change. Place the basket in a convenient place, such as the bedside table or beside the chair where the client is usually sitting when you do the dressing change.

- If you are cleaning the house, place all the cleaning supplies you need (sprays, sponges, dust cloths) in a basket with a handle. That way you can carry all the supplies from room to room and always have everything you need.

- If you cook for your client, consider taking one day to do all the cooking for the week. Or, each time you make a meal, make one or two extra servings.

- Place the extra single serving in a freezer safe plastic container, label it with the date and the contents, then freeze it. Later, this single serving dish can be taken out of the freezer, reheated in the microwave and served. Just like a frozen dinner from the supermarket—but healthier!

- Take some time to organize cupboards and the refrigerator and freezer. That way you know what you have on hand and what you need to pick up at the grocery store.

- Always make a list before going grocery shopping!

SAMPLE SCHEDULE—This is a sample of how you might organize your mornings if you had a single client. You could adapt the grid to work with multiple clients, as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROM Exercises</td>
<td>ROM Exercises</td>
<td>ROM Exercises</td>
<td>ROM Exercises</td>
<td>ROM Exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean/Organize Kitchen Make Grocery List</td>
<td>Bath</td>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>Bath</td>
<td>Vacuum/Dust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Shopping</td>
<td>Cook for the Week</td>
<td>Fold/Iron/Put Away</td>
<td>Clean Bathrooms</td>
<td>Mop Floors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Create extra hours...get up early! If you get up one hour earlier for a year, you’ll give yourself enough extra hours to equal 10 work weeks.

• If your supervisor asks you to do more tasks than you can finish in one day, be sure to ask which task takes priority. Then, finish that task first.

• Keep in mind that most people tend to avoid difficult or boring tasks. Some of your coworkers might try to shift their unpleasant tasks onto you. Be sure you know how to say “no”!

• Remember that each person has different amounts of energy at different times of day. If you pay attention to your energy level for a few days, you’ll probably see a pattern. Maybe you’ll find that your muscles are strongest in the morning, but you think better in the afternoon. If possible, plan your day so that you work hardest during the times when you have the most energy.

• Having a good breakfast helps keep your brain “fed” throughout the morning. DON’T SKIP BREAKFAST!

• Eating a large lunch makes many people feel sleepy. If you feel like taking a nap every afternoon, try eating a lighter lunch.

• Write down your goals. People who write down their plans are more likely to achieve their goals.

• Look for ways to save time every day. Share the things that work for you with your coworkers.

• Wear an alarm wristwatch. Then, if you want to complete a task in 45 minutes, set the alarm for 30 minutes and check your progress. Can you finish your task in 15 more minutes?

• If you are stuck not knowing what to do, ask yourself, “What is the best use of my time right now?” Answering this question can help you decide what your priority should be at any particular time.

• Don’t waste time regretting past failures. Learn from your mistakes and then continuing moving forward. Hanging on to feelings like regret and guilt is a big waste of time.

• Keeping a To Do list every day is one of the secrets to getting more done. Most successful people will tell you that they make a To Do list every day. If they don’t finish everything on the list that day, they put the leftover tasks on the next day’s To Do lists.

• When creating goals for yourself, make sure you have some way to measure your progress. For example, saying, “I really want to get all my inservice hours done early this year” isn’t really a goal. It’s just a wish. Instead, try saying, “I will complete two inservice hours each month.” This gives you something specific to reach for—and you can easily check yourself each month to see if you have met your goal.

• Make sure your goals give you some “action” to take. Look at this goal: “I will be more of a team player at work.” It doesn’t tell you how to meet that goal. Check out the same goal, written a different way: “Every day at work, I will ask two coworkers if they need help.” Now, you have a specific way to reach your goal of becoming a better team player!

• Keep in mind that teamwork can be a real timesaver. If you are a home health aide, you may not be able to work along side anyone. But, if you are able to work together with a coworker...do it! For example, which do you think would get the task done faster? Two people each making 5 beds? Or, two people making 10 beds together? Try it and see!