MANAGERS HAVE four kinds of resources: people, equipment, money and time. Of these, only time is irreplaceable, which means that time management skills are essential for success. By using the techniques below therefore, you can identify and focus on activities that you find manage your time best.

1 PREPARE ACTIVITY LOGS
Preparing and keeping activity logs over periods of several days helps you to understand how you spend your time, and when you perform at your best. Without modifying your behaviour any more than necessary, note down what you do and how much time you take when accomplishing tasks. Note down all of your activities, even including opening post, making coffee and chatting with colleagues.

2 LEARN FROM ACTIVITY LOGS
After you have kept your log for a few days, analyse it. You will probably be surprised at how long you spend on ‘low value’ tasks.

3 LISTEN TO ‘INTERNAL CLOCKS’
You are probably aware already of the times of day when you perform best. Some people perform better in the mornings for example, others in the afternoons, depending on personal rhythms. You can use this information systematically to reserve your high performance hours for your most difficult tasks.

4 CONSIDER DELEGATION
Try to avoid undertaking tasks that can be delegated to others. In considering delegation, you can refer to Ten steps to effective delegation, in December’s Nursing Management.

5 PREPARE PRIORITISED ‘TO DO’ LISTS
‘To do’ lists comprise all the tasks you need to do over periods of time. In making such lists, you can divide large tasks into smaller ones if necessary. When you have made a list, allocate priorities to each of its items according to for example an alphabetical system in which A represents ‘most important’ and F ‘least important’. Then rewrite the list in order of priority to ensure that you carry out your highest priority tasks first.

6 USE ‘TO DO’ LISTS
‘To do’ lists can prioritise tasks daily, weekly or monthly, while low priority actions can be added to the next lists.

7 MANAGE INTERRUPTIONS
When you are busy and do not want to be interrupted, keep your office door closed. Use your body language to discourage interruptions, for example by turning your head but not your entire body towards visitors. Consider also the arrangement of furniture in your office: position your desk so that, when you are sitting at it, passers cannot catch your eye easily, and position a clock so that it is visible to both you and your visitors. If possible, have your telephone calls screened.

8 USE MODERN TECHNOLOGY
Use your computer and email systems effectively. Ensure that the emails you send are short and addressed accurately. Deal with the emails you receive daily so they don’t pile up and delete them when they are no longer required. If possible, use an efficient ‘frequent contacts’ telephone system.

9 MANAGE MEETINGS
There are several types of meetings but, in the context of time management, they can be divided into two: those you control and those you don’t. Because meetings are time consuming, you should try to take as much control of your ‘meeting time’ as possible. At the beginning of meetings that you control, such as one-to-one meetings or those that you chair, stipulate how long they should last. Review your meeting schedule from time to time and attend only those that are necessary.

10 ‘DEAL WITH THE PIECE OF PAPER ONLY ONCE’
However your correspondence arrives to you, whether by post or email, make sure you deal with it straight away. Decide on the kind of action it requires and do it immediately. Putting it to one side to be dealt with later can become habitual, and only wastes time.

FINAL POINT
Setting aside time to analyse how you work, and how much time you spend working, can be in itself an invaluable time saver. It can help you to make your day more productive and less stressful. Time planning depends on a methodical and disciplined approach however, and to do it successfully you may need to be ruthless, both with yourself and with others.

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