

Time Management for Muslim Health Practitioners

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The only commodity in life that is given to all mankind in absolute equality is time. We all share the same 24 hours a day, 7 days through the week and 365 days per year. Yet only two variables differ; how many years each of us is given and how we spend this time, the former being uncontrollable, the latter being in our grasp. One of the first things that each one of us will be questioned about by God Almighty is our time. The Islamic literature does not go into detail regarding what the unit of time is that we are going to be accounted for. Is it every second, minute, day? But from that sense of responsibility, I'll try to shed some light on how to manage our precious time.

The aims of this article are:

1. To enable you to make the most of your time
2. To become more efficient in day-to-day activities.
3. To be more reliable and efficient
4. To achieve a better work-life balance.
5. To educate others around you not to be trapped by their bad time management.

Before learning about time management there is a question that must be asked. Why do you want to manage your time better? What is your motivation? What is your goal? Do you have that sense of valuing your time and what are you going to do if you have more of it?

To put it another way, if you have 26 hours a day or 8 days a week, will that make a difference to you? What are your wishes or goals in the short and long term?

For most of us, our starting point is to create a "to do list" for both the short- and long-term. Such lists should be split according to two classifications; importance and urgency, both of which are further subdivided into high and low. High importance and high urgency items (**A** in

the table) are the highest priority, but too many of them will burn you out. High importance, low urgency tasks (**B**) can be set aside until there is time available to plan them properly. Low importance, high urgency tasks (**C**) can be delegated to others or be taught to others so that they no longer need to be undertaken by you. Finally, low importance and low urgency tasks (**D**), such as relaxation and hobbies, should not be sacrificed otherwise burnout may occur in the long run. (Table 1).

Table 1:

	High Importance	Low Importance
High Urgency	A (no delegation)	C (others badly managed)
Low Urgency	B (plan for later)	D (relaxed time)

It would be important to follow a step-by-step guide:

1. Make your 'To Do List'
2. Prioritize it according to your goals
3. Fill in the week
4. Give double the time you expect for each task
5. Leave gaps for unexpected tasks
6. Fill in the gaps.
7. Learn how to deal with time wasters.

Giving double the time will give you more confidence and may create more relaxation time...enjoy it as a reward. Filling the gaps in your day can be looked at like a jar full of big pieces of rocks presenting your category A, the highly important, highly urgent tasks. Then come the smaller-sized pieces representing the less important, less urgent tasks. Finally comes the sand that will fill all small spaces i.e., almost every minute of your day.

There are so many time wasters in our day, one of them being telephone calls. Every one of us has one or two people who we know call us just for a chat or to kill few precious minutes of our time. One of the ways to deal with such calls is the **GROW** model:

G: what is the goal of the call?

R: establish the reality of the situation. For example, so, you are calling me now to chat about your booked holiday.

O: options; for example, by saying: can we have a chat about it later on tonight or when we meet on the weekend?

W: what will you decide or wrapping it up and ending the call.

Paperwork is another known time trap, and we can deal with it in one or two ways. The Salami, or Pastrami, way meaning bit by bit, spending short spells of time, even 5-10 minutes at a time, to start sorting files and documents in three piles: urgent, filing and binning. The alternative way is to dedicate a whole day and decide to take a massive action of sorting all these files in one go.

Procrastination, meaning delaying decisions or actions and letting an issue or a decision that needs to be faced to drag on and on. Fear, frustration or simply a lack of courage or knowledge are all known reasons why we delay things and most of us have been in this situation at least once, however this should not paralyse us or our teams from moving forward. It usually leads to spending more time on tasks in the long term. Take for example how much time we spend trying to find something in the middle of a disorganized cupboard or a room. The delay in taking the decision and sorting that room or drawer out because of the fear that it may take a long time actually results in wasting more time in the long-term trying to find an item in the middle of the chaos. So, one tool of dealing with this handicapping shortfall is to ask why you are delaying facing the issue at hand, then try to find a solution to address these reasons. Facing these reasons is

the best way to take the first step towards dealing with any of them.

Delegation is key for more achievement so you can have time to do more or to progress to the next level of your planned goals. There is a science and an art to delegation to make it work for you and your time. Knowing who to delegate to, what to delegate and when to delegate are all essential for delegation to work for anyone. Supervision, follow up and feedback from and to the person you have delegated to are essential ingredients of the whole process. We all understand the sequence of see one, do one and teach one when we are learning new skills and taking new responsibilities and roles. As a general rule we start by delegating the least urgent, least important tasks then move upward gradually when becoming more confident and trusting of our team members.

One final skill that we need not only to learn but to master is how to do more tasks simultaneously. Multitasking is being practiced by almost all of us, but we do not realise that we are already doing it. We all listen to our patients while taking history and simultaneously typing or writing few words at the same time. How about if you can have someone watching you doing this as part of their training? So here you are, you have already added a third task. You may even add to that the organising of some leaflets, in advance, of most of the conditions or procedures that you need to give to your patients and so on.

Two concepts that many scientists are probably shy to talk about is the blessing in time and the blessed time. The blessing in time is what most of us will call efficiency in utilising our time, i.e., achieving more in the minimum time. This efficiency, or what Muslim scholars call blessing, is based on a balance between both tangible and spiritual factors as a general Islamic concept in looking at life as a whole. Planning, prioritising, preparedness, and self-discipline are all basic requirements, and the spiritual element of praying, knowing your self-limitation and above all focusing on the ultimate goal that whatever you are doing is, above all, to please your Creator and to be in harmony with your well recognised values in life. This balance gives us all that extra energy and efficiency, which early scholars simply called blessing.

The blessed time is that time of the day where you are most fresh, eager to perform and full of energy. Most of the great Muslim scholars historically identify that time as being the time after their early morning (dawn) prayer. Provided that you had good quality sleep, this is where

your body and mind are fresh to tackle what was planned for already, like studying, revising etc.

To summarise then, we must have a goal or goals to use our time successfully. We start with a 'to do list', prioritize the items on that list according to level of urgency and importance. Fill in the weekdays spreading these items according to your timetable. Give each item double the initial expected time for each task. Leave gaps in between for unexpected tasks then fill in the gaps with other smaller tasks. Learn how to deal with time wasters by developing your own strategies that work best for you. Finally celebrate your achievements to boost your energy

before moving on to the next goal. Be aware of the blessing that you have the option to spend time on different tasks and keep the balance between the four mentioned squares of importance and urgency.

Further recommended reading:

Effective Time Management Skills for Doctors (Developmedica): Making the Most of the Time You Have (Progressing Your Medical Career): Making the Most of the Time You Have (Developmedica) Paperback – 31 Oct. 2009. By Sarah Christie . ISBN-13 : 978-1906839086