



MANAGEMENT CONNECTION

9 TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR FOODSERVICE LEADERS

BY CHRISSY CARROLL, MPH, RD

2,400 MINUTES—that’s what you’ll find in a 40-hour work week to accomplish every task on your plate.

That might sound like a lot, but you know that those minutes fly by faster than a hot knife through butter. Between managing staff, ensuring food quality, and administrative struggles, time always seems in short supply, and unfortunately there’s no way to increase this precious commodity.

All is not lost, though. Luckily, there are many tips that can help you make the most of each minute!

1. PLAN FOR THE DAY.

Before starting the day, create a plan. Kimberley Wiemann, MS, RD, a Long Island-based foodservice director, says, “It is important to know your priorities, including what needs to be dealt with immediately versus what can wait. I always make a list of what I plan to accomplish in the day. I may not get through everything, but focusing first on the most important or time-sensitive items helps.”

You can set aside a few minutes at the start of the morning, or even consider mapping out tomorrow’s plan today.

As Jackie Adler, SNS, MS, RDN, Foodservice Director K-12 at Bethlehem Central School District tells us, “Make your plan for the next day before you leave work, or at least before bed. Sure, the day is going to go haywire. But if you crunch out a vague map of the day, then you get to work with a plan already shaped. No wasting time and less freaking out (minus those fun emergencies of course).”

While planning, you can play around with a method that works for you. Some people prefer a simple approach, like asking themselves – what are the three most important tasks that, if completed, will make the day a success?

Adler describes her system as a stoplight plan, defining the coming day’s tasks as “reds (must dos/deadlines/scheduled meetings), yellows (coming soon/deadlines imminent), and greens (the “if I have times”).”

2. USE THE EISENHOWER MATRIX TO HELP PRIORITIZE TASKS.

The Eisenhower Matrix is a tool you can use to better prioritize your workday and make progress towards your department’s goals. The matrix, outlined in Steven Covey’s book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (and named after Eisenhower), is divided into four sections:

- Urgent and Important – Tasks that are essential to your role and need to be done ASAP.
- Important and Not Urgent – Key planning and strategic thinking, as well as tasks that need to be done but don’t have an immediate deadline.
- Urgent and Not Important – Tasks that seem pressing but aren’t essential to your role or don’t require your expertise to do them. You may be able to delegate, automate, minimize, batch, or eliminate these, depending on the task.
- Not Important and Not Urgent – Time wasters that don’t serve you and are often worth eliminating or minimizing.

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Unfortunately, humans are subject to a phenomenon known as the “mere urgency effect.” Research shows that people are more likely to focus on unimportant tasks over important tasks when the former have some sort of urgency attached to them (think of that “ping” of your email notification drawing you in).

Now that you’re aware of it, though, you can make plans to combat that effect. Focus on the most important work each day.

While this obviously includes “urgent and important” tasks, it also should include time in the “important and not urgent” section. This big picture planning and task execution often gets pushed to the side, where it later becomes urgent and feels overwhelming—or even worse, falls off the radar completely. Spending a little time each day in this section will



IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOT PROCRASTINATE!

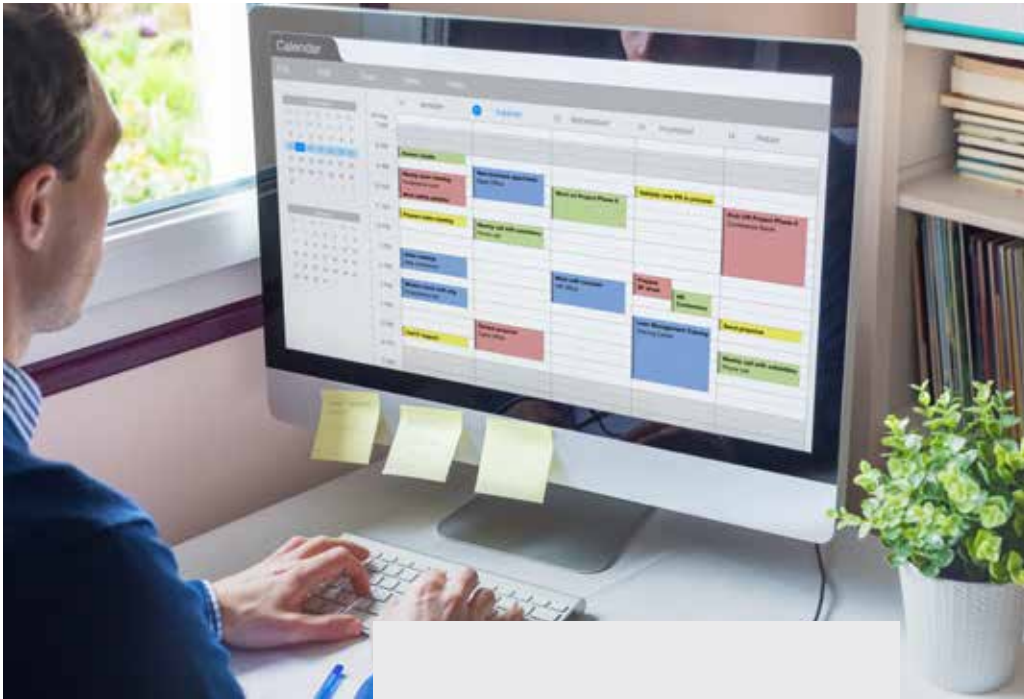
With so many moving parts in a foodservice operation, including food supply, staffing, and functioning equipment, it is key to plan ahead.

help you avoid that and make progress towards your big goals.

Wiemann echoes this, saying, “It is important to not procrastinate! With so many moving parts in a foodservice operation, including food supply, staffing, and functioning equipment, it is key to plan ahead.” Working in the “important and not urgent” section of the matrix gives you the time to do so. “Then, if something doesn’t go according to plan, you have an opportunity to make a well-thought-out plan B,” Wiemann says.

3. DELEGATE TO OTHERS.

With only so many hours in the day, it’s essential to realize that you can’t do everything by yourself. Michelle Saari, MSc, RD, founder of The Dietitian Prescription and former foodservice director, says, “Learn what is critical in your job to keep your eyes on daily, what can be delegated



to other supervisors and staff members, and what simply needs your reviewing. Be clear in what you are delegating to various staff members, so they know what their responsibilities are.”

Don't let perfectionism stand in the way of delegation. You may think – “but I could do it better myself” or “it will take too long to train someone.” This mindset can keep you feeling stuck on the hamster wheel of overwhelm and exhaustion.

As Saari says, “Things like creating schedules, filling in shifts, and purchase ordering can be delegated to others. As a manager you will review the schedules and purchase ordering, but you don't need to be involved in the total creation process.”

4. BATCH WORK AND SET ROUTINES.

Batching refers to setting aside specific blocks of time in your week where you focus on only one type of task. Your brain doesn't need to do much task switching and you're able to better execute that work with more precision. For example, you might batch:

- Answering emails
- Scheduling
- Planning menus
- Inventory management
- Social media (if you do this in your role)

BATCHING

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Routines take batching a step further, setting a specific repetitive schedule for yourself (and maybe your staff as well) with these time blocks. For example, perhaps Monday afternoons are when you always do inventory, and Wednesday mornings are the day you regularly do scheduling.

Routines increase efficiency because they take away decision fatigue, which drains mental energy. There's no need to wonder “what should I do now?” because you've already got it mapped out.

Obviously, those “urgent and important” tasks can derail a routine sometimes, but it is still valuable to loosely have in place.

5. ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS.

When you are in the flow, especially when it comes to big picture planning and strategy, the worst thing that can happen is uninvited distractions.

Research supports this. A University of California Irvine study found that being distracted or interrupted during the work day led to more stress, time pressure, and subjectively feeling like the work was harder.

Reducing distractions can help you improve focus and feel better about your work. It would be impossible to completely eliminate distractions in our industry, but here are some tips to cut down on them:

- Turn off notifications on your phone for social media or apps.
- Set boundaries with colleagues and staff.
- Create a sign for your office that indicates you're doing focused work, letting employees know what type of situations would dictate disturbing (for example, a plumbing emergency).
- Close out unnecessary tabs, emails, or documents on your computer.

6. USE TECHNOLOGY AND AUTOMATION.

Technology and automation may take some planning and capital up front, but it can save time and money down the road. You should assess what is right for your organization given the population and budget.

Here are some ideas to consider:

- *Inventory management software.* Newer systems may allow you to track stock digitally and automatically notify you when low so you are able to place an order (or perhaps you set this up to even auto-order for you).
- *Remote temperature monitoring.* These special sensors can be placed in walk-in coolers to automatically monitor the temperature. You can have records generated for compliance, and alerts sent to you should the temperature rise above the limit.
- *Apps for in-room food service.* This is not commonplace but may become so in the future. As the current population ages, more folks will enter hospitals and long-term care with ample experience on mobile devices. Future patients may be comfortable with apps designed for them to select that day's meals. There is already an app on the market for hospital use, though users report it is still glitchy. However, technology will continue to evolve in this area. As a bonus, apps can help users who are on certain diets by automatically tracking nutrients or limiting selections.
- *Automated checkout systems.* Automating the checkout process can save time, as well as money on labor costs. This could be done through self-checkout kiosks or by using a mobile device, potentially in hospital or school cafeterias.

- *Training.* Certain types of training can be done with established online courses or videos, rather than reinventing the wheel.

Of course, not all ideas will work in every situation. For example, if you work with a population that doesn't have high technology literacy, it's probably not a great idea to ask them to use a mobile app to order from their room.

7. INCLUDE A TIME BUFFER.

While scheduling your day is important, avoid the urge to plan every single minute. As you well know, the foodservice industry in particular is subject to its fair share of surprises.

Try to include some buffers of unscheduled time in your workday that give you the chance to address any last-minute issues, give you breathing room if a task is taking longer than expected, or simply provide some space to build morale with your team.

EISENHOWER MATRIX

What the Eisenhower Matrix might look like for a foodservice manager.

<p style="text-align: center;">URGENT & IMPORTANT <i>(Need to be done ASAP)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address walk-in cooler that has risen above temperature guidelines • Oversee execution of mealtime to review effectiveness of newly implemented system • Address patient/resident complaint • Implement new practices in line with recently passed local food safety legislation 	<p style="text-align: center;">IMPORTANT & NOT URGENT <i>(Plan for these regularly)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research remote temperature monitoring systems • Plan future special event • Create next month's menu plan • Create a plan to reduce food waste • Conduct ongoing staff in-services
<p style="text-align: center;">URGENT & NOT IMPORTANT <i>(Minimize, automate, batch, delegate, or eliminate)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to non-essential emails • Attend to minor problems that could be solved by others • Interruptions from other staff • Certain types of data entry • Meetings without objectives/goals 	<p style="text-align: center;">NOT IMPORTANT & NOT URGENT <i>(Eliminate when possible)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micromanage staff • Scroll social media • Develop an overly elaborate organizational system • Engage in disruptive socialization (gossip, complaining, etc.)



REFERENCES

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8. TAKE SHORT BREAKS.

When you work on tasks for a long period of time, you may start to lose focus or get frustrated. Taking short breaks throughout the day will alleviate that strain. It may be even better if you can set specific timed breaks in the day.

Let's consider this: a study in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* examined the impact of systemic breaks (pre-determined time frames) or self-regulated breaks (where the person chose when to break) on students while studying. When they had pre-determined systemic breaks, there was less fatigue and distractedness, more concentration and motivation, and similar task completion in shorter time frames.

You're probably not a student, but your brain functions the same way during tough work assignments. Systemic breaks can help you complete tasks with less fatigue and more focus.

Try the "Pomodoro" technique, where you set a timer for 25 minutes and work without distractions until the alarm rings. Then take a 5-minute break to allow your brain to reset. You can use this cadence throughout the day for any of your office work, taking longer breaks after several consecutive pomodoros.

9. AVOID MULTITASKING.

Contrary to popular belief, none of us are truly good at multitasking. The human brain generally prefers focusing on one task at a time.

When you attempt to do two tasks at once, you're not really multitasking, but rather consistently switching back and forth between the two tasks. Research has shown you often take longer to complete the tasks and do so with more errors than if you had focused on only one at a time.

There are exceptions, mainly when one or both tasks are actions that don't require tons of cognitive focus. For

example, you could likely dice a bunch of carrots in the kitchen while simultaneously listening to a podcast. Dicing requires motor skills, but for experienced foodservice folks, it doesn't necessarily require much cognitive focus.

However, let's say you were asked to develop a carrot soup recipe from scratch, including measurements and cooking instructions. Could you focus on a podcast at the same time as you were developing it? Probably not if you're hoping to do the recipe development task as quickly and accurately as possible. Developing the recipe requires much more

cognitive function than dicing the carrots.

In other words, when work requires your brain power, focus on that task at hand and avoid multitasking.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Time management doesn't always mean working faster or cramming more into your day, but rather being mindful of how you allocate your time in line with your goals. As the saying goes, work smarter, not harder. Try implementing a couple of these tips to help you stay productive, focused, and organized. **E**

**TRY THE POMODORO
TECHNIQUE.**

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This **Level I** article assumes that the reader has introductory knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a basic understanding and explanation of the concepts of the subject matter and recalling of related facts.



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1. What is the name of the phenomenon where people tend to focus on tasks that are not important, simply because there is a sense of timeliness to them?
 - A. Prioritization effect
 - B. Mere urgency effect
 - C. Multitasking effect
2. You want to apply for a grant for a new salad bar for your foodservice program. The grant application is due in six months. Writing the grant application would most likely fall under which section of the Eisenhower Matrix?
 - A. Urgent and important
 - B. Urgent and not important
 - C. Important and not urgent
3. Routines can help you manage your time because they reduce:
 - A. Decision fatigue
 - B. Your workload
 - C. Technology costs
4. Which of the following is true regarding research on distractions at work?
 - A. Distractions lead to more stress
 - B. Distractions can make the work feel subjectively harder
 - C. Both of the above
5. You are the CDM, CFPP at a long-term care facility. Most clientele is over age 80. Which time-saving technology would be the best choice, given your organization and population?
 - A. Remote temperature sensor for the walk-in cooler
 - B. Mobile app for residents to order meals on their phone
 - C. A food delivery drone that flies trays to patients
6. Which of the following is true regarding research in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* on systemic vs. self-regulated breaks?
 - A. Self-regulated breaks led to less fatigue and more concentration
 - B. Systemic breaks led to less fatigue and more concentration
 - C. Both types of breaks worked equally well
7. What is the "Pomodoro" technique for productivity?
 - A. Work 2 hours straight, take a break for 30 minutes
 - B. Work for 45 minutes straight, take a break for 15 minutes
 - C. Work for 25 minutes straight, take a break for 5 minutes

