Time to manage

a practical guide for social care managers

skills for care

Who is this guide for?

This guide is aimed at adult social care registered managers or those in a similar role. We know that your role is often complex, with competing demands on your time. This guide looks at how you can start to tackle this challenge by looking at ways to manage your time, empower your workforce and delegate tasks effectively.

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Introduction

Do you find yourself thinking 'I want to manage my time better, but I can never seem to find the time to do it?'

The first thing to say is that time management is not about managing time itself. Time management is about managing the way we spend the time available to us. Start by considering that:

- you have the same 24 hours in the day as everyone else; it's important to keep possession of this
- when we talk about time management, we're talking about managing ourselves
- it's not just about learning to say 'no', it's about learning how to say 'yes' to what matters – then prioritising it
- it's important not to prioritise your schedule; instead schedule your priorities
- effective time management can reduce stress and improve wellbeing.

Control time, don't let it control you

Most of us won't have looked at our job description recently, but perhaps we should. If we can start to identify the key areas of our work (the ones most critical to success) then we can begin to think about how we prioritise these. Good management of time within these priority areas is key to our efficiency and success.

In a busy workplace it's easy for day-to-day demands on our time to divert or distract us from our main role, but these demands aren't always the ones which will have the most impact.

The challenge is to keep up with all the demands placed upon us in a time-compressed and complex world and still maintain quality of care. You're asked to manage conflicting priorities, information overload, inspection and regulation demands in a fast-paced and demanding sector.

This guide offers suggestions and practical approaches to how you utilise the time you have available to you, using time management techniques and strategies.

> **Being a registered manager is a very rewarding job, but it can, at times, be frustrating and all-consuming. You need to be dedicated, driven and compassionate, but also be able to step back to cope with the pressures of the position. It can be very difficult not to let your personal feelings affect some of the decisions that you have to make.**
>
> **So my advice to new managers is to manage your time well and try not to take things too personally.**
>
> **Emma Walton, Registered Manager, Elmsfield House Ltd**

About time management

Why managing your time is crucial

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Why managing your time is crucial

When we concentrate on spending our time productively and in a balanced fashion the benefits can be huge. Taking control of our time means we make better decisions, feel less pressure and take a more holistic view of our priorities.

> **The pressures that we face as a service can lead to us spending more of our time behind a desk, rather than actually managing the service and being on the floor overseeing the operation. I think we could benefit from redressing this balance.**
>
> Emma Walton, Registered Manager, Elmsfield House Ltd

The benefits of effective time management

Accomplish more with less	You can get more done with less effort when you take control and focus. By planning effectively, you avoid wasting time and effort.
Make better decisions	If you haven't got the time to review your options, there's an increased risk of making the wrong decision.
Planning will reduce pressure	Reduce the strain and pressure of feeling rushed and overwhelmed.
Be in control	Being in control of your time will help to create a positive workplace culture.
Time to learn	Avoid being too busy to learn; your personal development is too important to let slip.
Time for yourself	Allocate time to your own wellbeing. Care management can be hugely stressful; you're at your best when you look after yourself as well.

The warning signs of bad time management

You might think you're fine and just very busy at the moment, but that shouldn't be the way you live your working life if you want to keep on top of your wellbeing. Warning signs that you're not managing your time effectively include:

- de-prioritising work but feeling anxious that this needs to be completed
- feeling frustrated because you don't get everything done that you want to
- not having time to read important things thoroughly
- getting home too tired and finding little time to relax
- skipping lunch.

Look at the government information about working hours and reflect on the way you work. Registered managers are expected to lead by example. If you work too many hours, you may be role modelling the wrong behaviours.

Visit **www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours** to find the working hours guidelines.

Personal benefits of time management

We all want to feel happy and satisfied in our lives and our work should contribute to this.

For managers of adult social care services, having the time to help people to achieve their own goals can be immensely rewarding. Knowing the difference that you're making is what motivates you.

However, it's not all about other people, we also need to look after ourselves to keep healthy and achieve other personal goals.

✓ **More time and headspace for personal interests and hobbies**

✓ **Clarity about what you want to achieve and how you will do this**

✓ **Happiness and a great deal of satisfaction from your job**

✓ **Less stress and anxiety**

✓ **Improved quality of life**
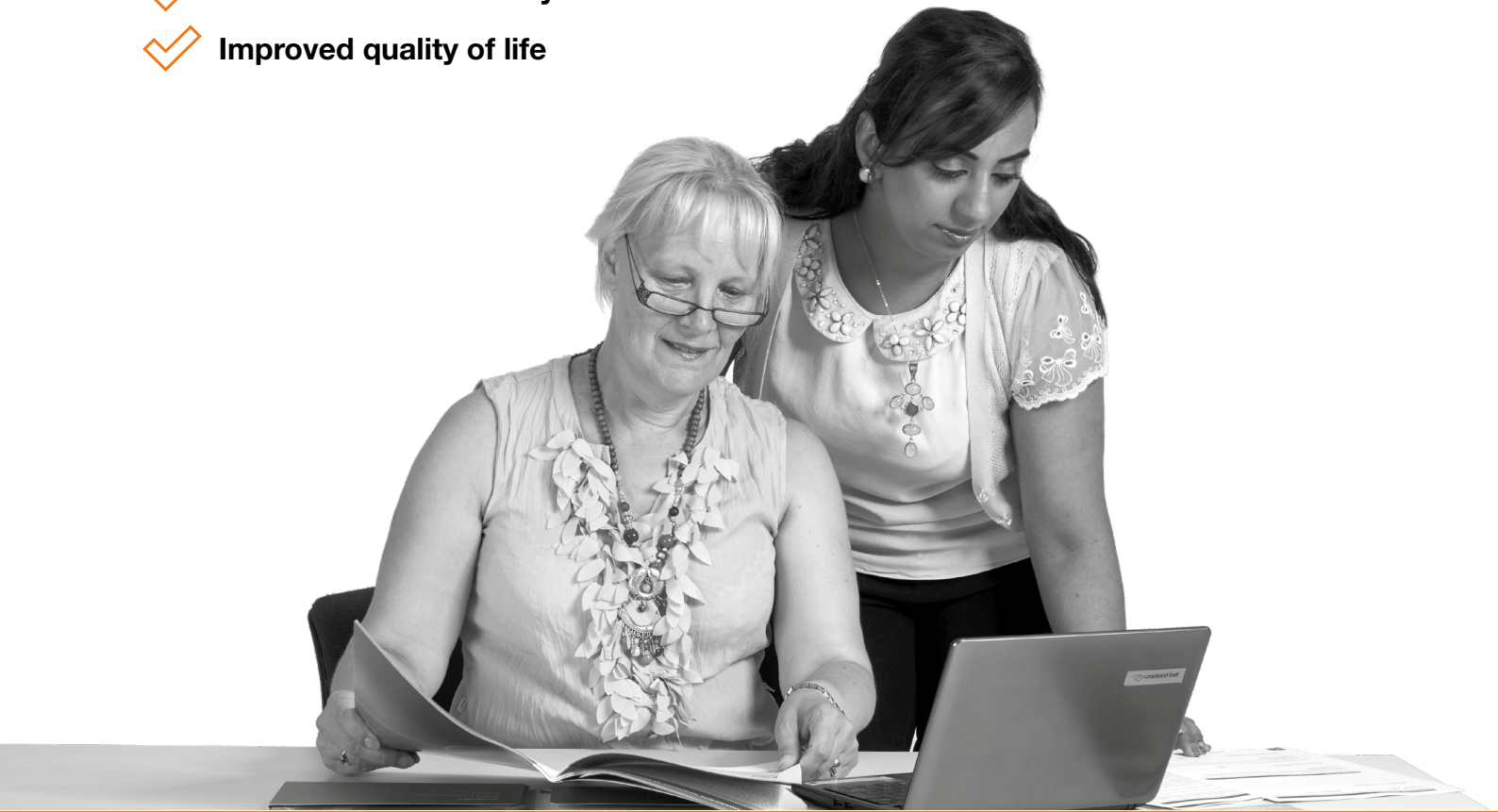
> **One of the most important lessons for me has been that, as a manager, you have to avoid always putting yourself last. Think about looking after yourself as a part of being able to look after others. We do a lot of giving in this sector, so your own resilience is key.**
>
> Julie Lusk, Registered Manager, Clinton Lodge (Solar Care Homes Limited)

Understanding your energy hotspots

We often talk loosely about whether we're a 'morning person' or a 'night owl', or that we don't like working Mondays, but love Fridays… this is often because we have different energy levels. Recognising our energy hotspots and cold spots can help us to manage our time more effectively.

> **I'd recommend dividing the day into manageable areas. I attempt to book interviews in the morning and meetings and viewings with potential residents and families in the afternoon.**
>
> **A lack of control of your day and being too reactive to situations can contribute to stress and anxiety. As registered managers we need to react positively to certain situations, however, we must also proactively manage our day and our tasks.**
>
> **Steve Oswald, Operations Director, Goatacre Manor Care Centre**

Before thinking about tools, techniques and approaches to managing your time, take a moment to reflect on the questions on the next page and complete the table.

1. Are you a morning or an evening person?
2. Which hours in the day are the most productive for you?
3. Which days of the week do you feel best reflect your high energy levels?
4. Where do you find the best place to concentrate?
5. Can you work with background noise or do you prefer quiet?
6. How long are your concentration levels?

Managing your time

From time wasters, to time makers

Time management techniques

Prioritising your work

Tackling procrastination

How to protect your time

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From time wasters, to time makers

Most of us do things that aren't always a good use of our time. We have processes and techniques that we're familiar with, but are they helping us to get things done efficiently? A good example is the ineffective use of 'to-do' lists. These can be a powerful tool, but in their basic form, they don't encourage you to estimate, plan and schedule the time each task will take or recognise its importance or priority.

The following is just a sample of the common ways that we waste out time:

- lack of clear objectives
- not estimating how long a task will take
- shifting priorities
- leaving tasks unfinished
- frequent crises-management and firefighting
- taking on too much at once

- confused responsibility and authority
- over-involvement in routine details
- lack of effective delegation
- too many meetings
- lack of effective communication
- duplication of effort.

To avoid wasting time, we need to be organised in the way that we go about spending our time to achieve our goals. To help you, this section introduces you to useful tools to help you structure and prioritise tasks, set objectives and make the most out of the time available to you.

Time management techniques

Setting clear objectives

Objective setting helps you achieve your goals by providing clarity, focus and motivation within a clear timeframe. As a registered manager, SMART target setting will help you in your role. As well as supporting effective time management and prioritisation, you can use it to manage change, set clear expectations with staff and to delegate.

The SMART model

S	M	A	R	T
Specific Describe the detail of what it will look like when you complete this objective.	**Measurable** How will you know when you have achieved this objective? What simple measures can you put in place that will help you to track your progress?	**Achievable** On a scale of 1–10 how confident are you that you can achieve this goal?	**Relevant** How do you see this complementing or supporting your other work activities?	**Timed** What's a realistic timescale to achieve this based on your workload and the needs of this piece of work?

Grouping tasks together

Over the course of your working week it's easy to go from one unrelated task to another. Whilst some tasks cannot be grouped with others, you'll find that many can, and you can save time by doing these related tasks together. This will require good diary management and the ability to protect time for more substantial work.

The table below shows the tasks outlined at the start of this guide ('How managers spend their time'), grouped together. You'll find an activity at the end of this section to group together the activities that you listed at the start of this guide.

General administration
- Read incoming emails
- Prepare handover notes for my upcoming weekend off
- Report glitch with the IT system you're using

Finance
- Review our latest accounts and budget
- Approve expenses of various staff members

Recruitment
- Review new applications
- Return a call to a recruitment agency
- Follow up references for potential new recruits
- Interview new staff

Induction, learning and development
- Induct staff
- Discuss changes to our training programme
- Discuss latest feedback from one of my internal champions

Community engagement
- Book myself onto a local network event
- Speak to a local community group about how they can support us

Quality improvement and compliance
- File important communications for CQC evidence
- Review care plans
- Review risk assessment
- Review latest NICE guideline
- Report and investigate an incident

Staff support
- Chair team meeting
- Staff supervision and notes
- Have a number of informal one-to-one discussions with staff
- Respond to issues raised by colleagues
- Celebrate staff member's birthday

Management
- Discuss an issue with the nominated individual
- Have a meeting with my line manager
- Complete daily handovers with colleague

Engaging with others
- Speak with people who need care and support
- Respond to feedback from a family member
- Meet new people wanting to use the service
- Directly deliver care

CPD
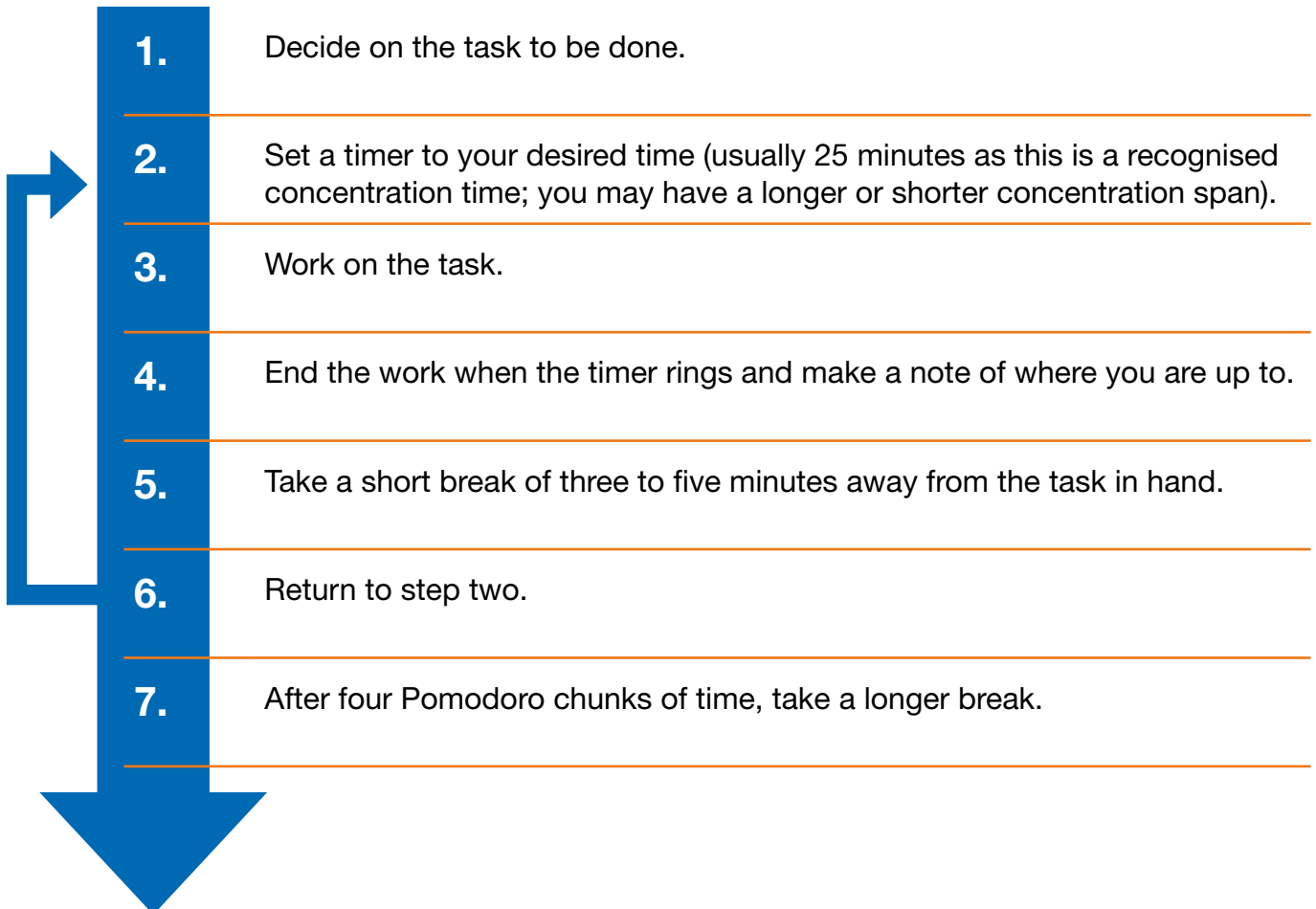- Read the Skills for Care registered manager members' newsletter

Other
- Find time for lunch
- Find time for a brew

The Pomodoro technique

The Pomodoro technique is a time management system that encourages people to work with the time they have, rather than against it. Using this method, you break your working day into 25-minute chunks separated by five-minute breaks.

The technique is well known for developing the user's focus and reducing interruptions and distractions. The underlying principles of the technique are below.

1.	Decide on the task to be done.
2.	Set a timer to your desired time (usually 25 minutes as this is a recognised concentration time; you may have a longer or shorter concentration span).
3.	Work on the task.
4.	End the work when the timer rings and make a note of where you are up to.
5.	Take a short break of three to five minutes away from the task in hand.
6.	Return to step two.
7.	After four Pomodoro chunks of time, take a longer break.

Why not try it yourself? You can use a timing device and a piece of paper to keep track of your time, or alternatively, there are plenty of Apps and websites that have been designed to help you with this technique.

Prioritising your work

Multi-tasking

Multi-tasking is a natural part of working life and represents good time management. However, there are times when it can impact negatively on how we manage our time.

It involves complex systems in the front of the brain, which give us the ability to carry out goal-related behaviours. We need to first choose which task to focus on, and then we need to switch to a different process in the brain to consider the new rules for the task in hand. Each time we switch tasks, we repeat the same process, which is an inefficient use of time.

Imagine working on a complex document. A call comes through which you must deal with. You end the call and return to the document. How much time does it take you to 'get back into it'? It's surprising how easily our thought processes can be derailed by interruptions.

Recommendations for prioritising your work

- Try limiting the tasks you're managing to no more than two at a time.

- Create a 'small tasks' section of your to-do list of tasks that can be completed in 15 minutes or less and then use short periods of unexpected time to work through them.

- When focusing on a task, turn off all electronic devices and any access to social media so you avoid unnecessary distractions.

- Plan your tasks so that you mix up your day between focused concentration, social tasks and simple tasks that give your brain a rest.

Offering and creating solutions that reduce toll on anyone having to remember and think more usually work well e.g. adding a reminder to a calendar or diary, adding information to a form, making a poster, creating a process. Reducing mental toll in this way leaves room for creativity and innovation across the board.

I have found disorganisation leads to being further disorganised. If everything has a place, everyone knows their role and everything has a process, things run a lot smoother. If a place, role or process isn't working, think why and make changes. This may not fix it but keep making changes until it does work for everyone.

Some people like to use hand-written diaries, others like digital organisers. I encourage people to use what works for them, otherwise its useless. Personally, I use Asana to help me organise myself and manage effectively. I find it really helps as I can break down a project into subtasks, add notes and share tasks with others.

Sarah Rossi, Managing Director, Caremark (Redbridge)

Tackling procrastination

Procrastination is the avoidance of doing a task that needs to be accomplished by a certain deadline. The following are some of the reasons why we procrastinate:

- avoiding the unpleasant – for example a task you don't want to do
- putting off tasks that feel overwhelming – like large or complex tasks
- fear of failure or a lack of confidence – for example a new or high-risk task
- a lack of clarity or understanding about what is expected.

Recommendations to overcome procrastination

✓ Reflect on the reason why you're procrastinating – it might be the case that the task you're avoiding isn't important (in which case, don't do it), or the timing is wrong (decide when it should be done). If your reasoning is not valid, then do something about it.

✓ Create a 'procrastination file'. Save genuinely 'doubtful' tasks that you choose to postpone because the need for the task to be completed may go away or because there'll be a better time later.

✓ Deal with the unpleasant tasks first. Tick them off your to-do list and you will feel much better. It won't be filling you with dread for the rest of the day or week.

✓ Ensure you understand what's being asked of you and break it up into manageable chunks. This reduces an overwhelming task into a 'doable' series of tasks. It will also highlight those bits of the task where you need extra help, information or resources.

✓ Find 'quick wins' such as tasks (five minutes or less) which will get you into tackling the main job.

✓ If all the above fails, then ask yourself: 'what will be the consequences if I keep putting off this task?'

How to protect your time

Drains on our time

Below are three common scenarios that can be a drain on our time.

1. Have you got a minute?

How does this drain your time?
Someone seeks you out and uses phrases such as "have you got a minute?" or "I just need a couple of minutes of your time".

It may seem easier to deal with the 'one quick question' than to put it off.

However, often the quick question is not so quick to answer and will be a distraction and interruption that stops you achieving what you've prioritised.

How to manage this
Build in ring-fenced time for such questions and encourage people to put their questions on a list for you both to discuss at a planned time.

Be open and honest, explaining how the interruptions are affecting you.

Focus on encouraging confidence, resourcefulness and self-management. You can look at mentoring and coaching to support these staff.

2. Can we have a meeting?

How does this drain your time?
Some managers find themselves going from one meeting to another, leaving them with little time for anything else.

How to manage this
Ask yourself: "do I need to be in this meeting?" or "what will happen if I don't attend?"

Know what you're contributing to a meeting in advance. Remember: it's acceptable to attend the meeting for your particular agenda item and then leave.

N.B. We have included a section on holding effective meetings in section 3.

3. Trivial things

How does this drain your time?
Trivial issues can sometimes be easier to tackle but can take you off track.

How to manage this
Be clear to yourself and others about the importance of what you're doing and explain your need to prioritise.

Encourage staff to develop the skills to identify and respect different priorities and the role of others in dealing with them.

Be careful not to assume that because you can see an issue as trivial, they're not important to others.

> **I used to start work later one day a week and then finish late; so I might do from 2-10pm. It allowed me to have a bit of 'me time' in the morning and meant that I could catch-up with night staff who came to work at 9pm that I otherwise would not see often. But most importantly, it meant I had the office to myself for four hours between 6-10pm. I used to get so much work done without interruptions.**
>
> **Pia Rathje-Burton, Skills for Care Locality Manager and former Registered Manager**

Saying 'No'

Saying 'No' can be difficult. There are many different reasons for this. Some people like to please others and feel that 'No' would be an unwelcome response. Others are afraid of the reaction a 'No' might provoke. On the other hand, some people are just unrealistic about what they're able to deliver.

Saying 'No' firmly and reasonably is quite acceptable to most people and much better than letting them down later. It can be helpful to think about the kind of things you find it hard to say 'No' to, or who it's hard to say 'No' to.

When saying 'No' to someone, think about how you can empower them to solve the problem, or accomplish the task they have asked you about, themselves. The importance of empowering your staff and delegating to them is explored in more detail in the next section of this guide.

Managing your time with others

Why it's important that we empower others

Delegating to others

Effective and efficient meetings

3

Why it's important that we empower others

Empowering employees will help you to develop a culture where staff feel committed to the organisation's goals and engaged to live out its values. This is critical to you as a manager; it improves the quality of care, helps you to retain valuable staff and it has an important impact on positive time management. Without it, you can be left with disengaged staff who don't contribute effectively to the overall achievement and direction of the service.

Empowered staff will free you from dealing with minor day-to-day activities and give you more time to reflect on organisational priorities.

The principles of employee empowerment

Resources	Managers equip staff with the right tools to get the job done efficiently, speedily and to excellent standards.
Clarity of goals	Managers clearly define organisational purpose. Managers connect all aspects of the organisation to its vision, values and objectives.
Information sharing	Managers develop clear lines of communication and share information effectively. Managers foster professional relationships.
Trust and respect	Managers cultivate safe and healthy working environments where staff can trust leaders and managers to do what's right and employees and managers respect each other.
Training and ability	Managers recognise their staff as their most precious resource. Managers support their staff to grow and develop, in turn building confidence and motivation.
Coaching	Managers build strong bonds amongst their teams and facilitate the sharing of best practice. Managers always role model expected values-based behaviours.

Remember

- Delegate more than just work. Provide staff with new opportunities to grow and learn (e.g. offering the opportunity to represent the organisation at external meetings and conferences, engagement with local media, etc).
- Give employees generous boundaries. When people take ownership of their work, they're more likely to put in extra effort and feel pride in the success they achieve.
- Be prepared for staff to make mistakes and recognise that they can learn from these to become more effective in their role. Build trust amongst your team by providing autonomy and empower your colleagues to be more responsible

Delegating to others

The benefits of sharing the workload

Delegation is an important skill, which doesn't just benefit you, but also your staff. Each time you delegate a task you aren't just managing your time, you're:

- giving someone a development opportunity, demonstrating trust and recognising their ability
- appreciating, acknowledging and working to people's strengths
- improving collaborative and flexible decision-making across your team
- creating higher morale and motivation across all staff
- increasing job satisfaction for all staff
- creating better understanding and ownership of organisational, team and individual goals.

Practical ways to delegate

You can structure your approach to delegation across four steps.

1. Choose what to delegate

- routine tasks that are easy to teach and will free up your time
- one-off or complex tasks that will help someone develop.

2. Choose who to delegate to

- a member of staff with a particular existing skills
- a member of staff with the potential to develop a new skill.

3. Discuss the delegated task(s) at hand

- explain why you are delegating the task
- make sure someone is happy to take on the new task.

4. Assign the work

- set SMART objectives (see section 2 of this guide)
- make sure the member of staff has everything they need to do the task.

> "As a manager, managing your own time starts from supporting other people to manage their own time effectively. If others are managing their tasks effectively, this will mean you are spending less time 'mopping up' the overspill.
>
> **Sarah Rossi, Managing Director, Caremark (Redbridge)**

Effective and efficient meetings

Most of us don't have formal training in how to run meetings efficiently and effectively.

Running effective meetings is not just a matter of doing the obvious things like sharing the agenda and starting on time. Whether it's face-to-face or virtually, an effective meeting brings a thoughtfully selected group of people together for a specific purpose, provides a forum for open discussion and delivers a tangible result: a decision, a plan, actions to take forward and a shared understanding of the work ahead.

The benefits of effective meetings are far-reaching. However, it's easy for poorly planned meetings to take excessive amounts of time, to become unfocused and ineffective. Remember:

Preparation and planning for the meeting

know why you are having the meeting, what you want from it and where it should be held
share an agenda, with time and a lead speaker allocated to each item.

During the meeting

start on time – even if there are late arrivals
keep people focused and sensitively encourage them to get to the point if they ramble
at the end of each item, summarise and minute the actions agreed.

Ending the meeting

ensure that any actions from the meeting have a completion date associated with them
agree whether you need to meet again, and if you do, set a date.

> **If chairing a meeting, prepare in advance, produce an agenda and stick to agenda items and set a timeframe for the duration of the meeting. In my experience, people remain more focused if they know how long they need to engage. I only agree to attend a meeting if the meeting is of value. Too much time can be wasted in meetings that do not add value. If you are sat in a meeting thinking about your expanding 'to-do list', then you shouldn't be attending the meeting.**

Steve Oswald, Operations Director, Goatacre Manor Care Centre

Technology and time

Using technology to save time

Emails

Apps

Social media

4

Using technology to save time

Effective time management, with the support of technology, can help reduce duplication of information and enable frontline workers to spend more time directly meeting the needs of the people they support. The Digitising Social Care website (**www.digitisingsocialcare.co.uk**) is a great place to get started, with useful information to help you use technology as a tool to save time and create efficiencies.

Consider how, in this case study, Belong's dementia care village in Warrington implemented new systems to free up time to care.

Case study

How introducing a digital system helped improve care

I have worked for over 30 years with a paper system, so you can imagine the anxiety and concern that I had about letting go. However, once shown the capability of a digital person-centred software system, I was hooked, intrigued and could see the benefits instantly. I now have no archiving to do, I can find information immediately without having to go into an individual house to look for it.

One feature of the digital system is the hospital pack that I can download and give with the Medication Administration Record (MAR) sheet to paramedics in times of emergency. This is a great time saver and allows me to concentrate on the individual as opposed to doing a paper chase. Digital features make my life so much easier and save me so much time and, I also feel much better informed.

I can monitor the progress or deterioration of the people we support at the press of a button through having instant access to assessment tool archives. This used to take a large chunk of time trawling though paper records and required a lot of storage space.

I can set up communities with limited access. For example, the gym instructor can add activities, or the admiral dementia nurse can look up information before she comes, and this has reduced her visit time by half.

Claire Bibby, General Manager, Belong

Emails

Email alerts can easily distract you when you have allocated time to complete a report or do the rota. If you go into mail preferences, you can either turn off the alert notifications pop-up message or turn the notification sound off.

You can also decide when to release your own emails to others, minimising further distractions from those who may instantly respond. Working in this way can ensure that you have dedicated time set aside for email related work.

Apps

There's a huge range of Apps that can make a positive difference to the time it takes to manage your service effectively and deliver responsive care. You can find Apps to help you with:

- scheduling your activity and tasks
- arranging meetings and supporting the management of remote workers
- tracking and managing resources and projects
- care planning and record management.

With the marketplace always evolving, the best approach is to search for the latest innovations or speak to other social care managers for their recommendations.

Social media

While many of us may regard social media as something that distracts us and takes up valuable time, many use social media as a practical tool to be more efficient.

Consider how in the case studies on the next page, Bethany Care Trust and Future Directions CIC are using social media as a time saving tool

Case study

Using social media as a time saving tool

Bethany Care Trust has a closed Facebook page for families and friends of our residents. This is updated at the end of each day to show families what their loved ones have been up to. This has proven really effective, particularly for residents who might not be able to recall what they've been doing when families phone them or visit. It gives families a talking point when they chat with their loved ones and provides comfort and reassurance that they're stimulated, socialising and content.

Anne Murray, Registered Manager, Bethany Care Trust

Initially when we started looking at social media, we were thinking more about external communications. However, I was amazed how powerful it has been for internal messaging and engagement.

Through our managers' use of social media, it really helps us to connect with staff. With staff based in multiple different locations, it's great that they get to know you better through this form of communication. It makes our leaders far more accessible to our staff. We find our staff are actively using our Facebook and Instagram, liking or commenting on stories about the people we support.

By investing in technology and developing our social media skills, we're able to better get messages out, which has really helped our staff to get to know us and take pride in the service.

The more you communicate in different ways and the more consistent you are, the more it is valued.

Paula Braynion, Managing Director, Future Directions CIC

Become a registered manager member of Skills for Care today and order your printed workbook edition of this guide for only £15.

As well as the recommendations included in this guide, it includes additional content, top tips and tools that you can use in time management process, including:

- a time log and self-assessment to help you think about how you already manage your time
- other techniques to use in time management, such as the Eisenhower Matrix for prioritising tasks and the GROW model to help staff solve problems
- workbook activities to help you embed the learning from the guide
- tools to help you plan your time over the coming weeks and months.

Become a member by visiting **www.skillsforcare.org.uk/membership**.

Finally

This guide was written for adult social care managers to help them to manage their time effectively and empower others across their service.

We know that the most important people in any service are the individuals you provide care and support to. However, as a sector, we must recognise that our ability to provide good and outstanding care is only possible if we make the best use of the resources we have, including ourselves and our time.

Acknowledgements

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