

# Limit Everyday Distractions: Tips for Practice Managers

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Concentration is the ability to focus attention voluntarily, to ignore irrelevant proceedings, and to fix power and effort to a single goal. Concentration is a time management tool that practice managers can increase through practice that will increase their productivity at work and at home.

One reason concentrating is so hard is that distractions abound. If you're looking for reasons not to get a task done or not to concentrate on a task, plenty exist. In fact, anything can become a distraction to your concentration if you allow it to interfere.

Distractions dissipate your energy level and reduce your productivity with a resulting increase in your level of stress. To increase your power of concentration, eliminate outside distractions by taking control of your environment.

Taking control of your environment increases your confidence and enhances your productivity. You're in charge, not those who otherwise fritter away your time.

When faced with challenging tasks, take steps to minimize all distractions, such as by putting an out-of-office reply on your e-mail and by instructing staff to interrupt you only in case of emergency.

Consider asking staff members to hold your non-urgent calls. One medical office manager was so bothered with constant phone calls that she recorded a voicemail message telling callers that she'd handle return calls between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. This was the time of day that she felt least able to concentrate on planning and oversight duties, and most comfortable talking to people. Within three weeks, her powers of concentration and productivity rose dramatically. Many callers readjusted their schedules to accommodate her schedule.

Surely there are stretches throughout the day and week when it's not mandatory for you to be on call. If most of your messages originate from a central source, such as the front desk, instruct staff regarding which calls should be immediately directed to you, and which can be held. You can use a system such as this:

- Level 1 (such as a disgruntled or angry patient or a family emergency) contact me now
- Level 2 (such as a staff member with a scheduling question) contact me within X hours
- Level 3 (such as a vendor checking in) contact me sometime today.
- Level 4 (such as a telemarketer) no need to contact me at all.

To make this system work, decide in advance precisely what constitutes Level 1 so that Level 1 summoning of you is indeed rare. These would be dire emergencies where your input is absolutely essential.