



Getting Things Done: Taking Effective Action in Client Care

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After reading the newsletter, the home health aide should be able to:

1. Identify common issues that can increase stress and decrease job effectiveness.
2. Discuss principles and techniques that enhance optimum client care, productivity, and job satisfaction.

As she left a client's home, Danielle, the home health aide, looked down at the schedule she'd written for herself that morning. "It's 10:30, and I'm right on track. I'm glad I thought to pick up the supplies that the nurse wants me to take to my next client, or I'd have to go back to the agency for those. I'll be with my next client until 11:45. Then I can have lunch and be done in time to see the new client that was just scheduled." Danielle has become skilled at planning her day and getting her work done efficiently. She creates a daily plan, but realizes it must be flexible in the fast-changing healthcare environment.



As a home health aide, your schedule and client's needs often vary greatly from day to day, and can change quickly. By practicing a few key principles, however, your workflow can be smoother, more efficient, and less stressful. This newsletter will discuss techniques to help improve productivity and client care, decrease stress, and improve job satisfaction.

Taking Effective Action

You can help to make your workday more productive and rewarding with these techniques:

On arrival: The first step in having a great work day is arriving in good shape to get started. Develop a calm and effective pre-work routine,

one that gets you to work on time, relaxed, and ready to go. Look at what is working and not working well now, in your current routine. Do you arrive at work exhausted and stressed? What can you change to avoid that? Consider options such as preparing the night before (setting out clothes, making lunches, etc) so that getting out of the house on time is not as hectic.

Be proactive and take initiative in your work: Taking control and organizing your work, whenever possible, maximizes efficiency. This not only helps you to become more productive, but also reduces stress and improves job satisfaction. At the beginning of each day, jot down a plan for the day with time frames. Don't forget to include time for your breaks and tasks you need to accomplish, such as picking up client supplies. Leave room for flexibility, to accommodate unexpected tasks.

Set your deadlines: Good use of time is very important in home care, since most clients have an allotted period of time for care. In planning your day or starting a task, it is helpful to set mental time frames for accomplishing the task. Setting a time goal for finishing often helps to accomplish the task more quickly. For example, "Mrs. Smith's bath takes about 30 minutes, so that will leave me time to help her organize her clothes for the week."



Write it down: In many cases, keeping thoughts and plans in your head results in stress, as there is continual self-reminding and worry, so that nothing is forgotten. This can result in errors when the information is forgotten. Always keep pen and paper (or computer notepad) at hand to jot down anything you'll need to remember.



Avoid procrastination: Do you ever put off some tasks because they are unpleasant, or you just don't want to do them? For example, you may cringe at the thought of telling a cranky co-worker that you've realized you can't switch days with her. Often, a postponed task hangs over us, causing dread and stress. The more quickly you tackle the task, the lower your stress level will be, so get at it. If it's a more long-term task, like a report for a class you're taking, tell yourself you'll work on it for just 15 minutes. Chances are, once you get started, you'll be able to make progress.

Leave your "home" problems at home: At times, everyone has concerns and issues in their home lives that can affect them at work. Unfortunately, stewing over these issues when you're at work and can't do anything about them simply causes increased stress. It can be helpful to think of work as a "worry free" zone for your at-home stressors.

Expect change and remain flexible: Negative reactions to changes in assignment or workload may cause stress and loss of productivity. Change is common in any healthcare setting, due to rapidly -changing client needs, staffing patterns, and other issues. Expect that changes will occur, remain positive, and alter your plan for the workday to meet them.

Recharge yourself, by the hour, day, week, month and year: Studies show that people who take breaks are able to increase their effectiveness at work. This is important for both the short- and long-term breaks. Take daily breaks as specified by your agency, for example, a 15-minute morning break and 30-minute lunch break. In addition, every hour or so, spend a few seconds in conscious relaxation, such as deep breathing. And, make sure to take the long-term breaks, as well— use the vacation time you earn to relax and rejuvenate yourself.



Don't let fear of rejection stop you: One reason that people may not make good progress or speak up at work is due to fear of rejection. Concerns such as, "What if they think it's a stupid

idea?" or "What if my supervisor doesn't like it?" may prevent good ideas or an employee's needs from being expressed. Perhaps you have some good ideas regarding scheduling, communication, policies, or any other aspect of your work environment. If you've thought them through and feel they may be of benefit, don't let fear of rejection cause you to stifle those ideas.

Foster good relationships with clients and staff: In the HHA position, interaction with others is an important part of the job. When you develop good relationships with the clients you care for and staff members you interact with, you can work together more effectively to accomplish goals.

Manage your stress: Becoming stressed, angry, or upset does not help you get your work done, and can have harmful effects on your health over time. Stress may arise from situations such as feeling overloaded with work or difficult interactions with others. To combat stress, find several techniques that help and use them when needed, such as relaxing your muscles, breathing deeply, and/or thinking of a pleasant memory. At break time, taking a quick walk and/or listening to music may help. Avoid using substances such as cigarettes or coffee to cope with stress.

Network with other HHAs: Sharing ideas and solutions to problems with others is a win-win. You can share ideas that work for you, and learn new ideas from others who understand the challenges of your job.

If you make a mistake: Every human being makes mistakes. If this happens, immediately inform your supervisor, take measures to correct it, and examine how it could be prevented in the future. Then don't beat yourself up over it or keep replaying it in your mind.

Don't let yourself get discouraged by a bad day: Everyone has difficult work days and makes mistakes at times. This can undermine self-confidence and decrease job satisfaction. It can also decrease motivation, and makes some people reluctant to put forth maximum effort. Realize that some days are going to be more difficult than others, and use the techniques noted here to improve your skills in dealing with those days.



Good client care, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and productivity can all be enhanced by focusing on effective work habits that help to get the job done in the best way possible.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____ UNIT: _____

Directions: Place the letter of the one best answer in the space provided.

- ____ 1. Preparing for an effective work day ideally begins:
- A. at home before work begins
 - B. as soon as you arrive at work
 - C. within 2 hours of your arrival at work
 - D. midway through the work day
- ____ 2. A work plan that is jotted down for the day should not change throughout the workday.
- A. True
 - B. False
- ____ 3. Which of the following techniques is most helpful for getting tasks done more quickly?
- A. documenting the tasks that have been done
 - B. listing tasks in order of priority
 - C. writing down a list of tasks to be done
 - D. setting time frames for tasks
- ____ 4. A HHA who makes a mistake at work should:
- A. fix it quickly, before anyone finds out
 - B. inform the supervisor and take measures to correct it
 - C. ignore it, since most mistakes aren't harmful
 - D. keep thinking about it, to prevent it from happening again
- ____ 5. Change is common in healthcare settings, and should be expected.
- A. True
 - B. False

- ___6. Which of the following may increase job stress?
- A. putting off doing an unpleasant task
 - B. keeping “mental notes” instead of writing things down
 - C. feeling as though you have little control over your work
 - D. all of the above
- ___7. Taking regular breaks and vacations can actually increase job effectiveness.
- A. True
 - B. False
- ___8. Maria is a HHA whose annual evaluation is coming up. She has been asked to complete a self-evaluation before the scheduled date, but dreads doing it. She can best get this task accomplished by:
- A. giving herself a few more days to see if she feels like doing it
 - B. waiting until the night before it’s due, since the pressure will help
 - C. telling herself that she will work on it for just 15 minutes today
 - D. asking for a day off from work to get it completed
- ___9. When she is feeling stressed, a home health aide takes all of the following actions. Which one is LEAST helpful in reducing her stress? She:
- A. practices deep breathing for a few minutes
 - B. takes a walk on her break
 - C. has another cup of coffee
 - D. focuses on relaxing her tense muscles
- ___10. The home health aide can enhance job effectiveness by:
- A. networking with other HHAs
 - B. offering ideas to improve agency functioning
 - C. developing good working relationships with others
 - D. all of the above

