

WOMEN IN FACIAL PLASTIC SURGERY: MY TOP 10 STRATEGIES

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The following information was first presented during the Women in Facial Plastic Surgery seminar last fall in Toronto. Since then, I have modified it to apply to both men and women in our field.

The following are my 10 most important strategies for physicians trying to stay sane in today's crazy busy world!

1. Get comfortable with juggling. All of us sort of roll our eyes at the word balance, that elusive Holy Grail of working people everywhere. It took me a number of years to realize that balance is a journey, not a destination. And, the path toward balance may be different each day.

2. Be well organized. This seems obvious, but is often overlooked to your detriment. I would seldom be anywhere on time if it were not for my Palm® Treo™ and the ability to hotsynch and coordinate with my assistant and department administrator. We make extensive use of Microsoft Outlook, with focused and shared task lists, meeting requests, transforming e-mails to a task and to a calendar item, etc.

3. Time management is part of balance. Nobody gets more than 24 hours in each day, and no one gets less. Even the best time management techniques will not let you get 36 hours of tasks into 24 hours. So, triaging and prioritizing is essential.

The two books I have found most helpful are *The Seven Habits* by Stephen Covey, and *Getting It Done* by David Allen. They are complementary systems, with top-down organization espoused by Covey, and bottom-up by Allen. Covey explains his approach with the rocks in the jar—then pebbles, then sand, then water—the principle is to make commitments to the big important things before your time and schedule is cluttered with less important things. This is a great concept I use daily, along with his Four Quadrants, which I am sure sounds familiar to you.

Then I had a real ah-ha when reading Allen's book, in which he talks of the open loops and capturing every detail. For example, you need to get your car inspected. Every time you walk into your garage, you remember that; however, you never remember this when you are near a phone and have the phone number to call and make an appointment to have it inspected. So, it stays in your head as an open loop, a should or a to-do with no resolution. In my case, I felt smug while glancing at the inspection sticker and thinking that it doesn't expire until May and it is only April—until I realized it was April 2006 and it expired May 2005. Anyway, the important

part is to take action. Don't let this thought pass through your mind, and then flitter in the background, consuming energy as an unfinished task. Capture it, write it down, and have a method for transferring these jottings to the appropriate task list: errands, phone calls, e-mails, etc. I highly recommend both of these books to you.

4. Hire good help in your office. When I first arrived at a new job, I inherited an assistant. For the first three to four months, I kept wondering why it took so much time and energy to get all the details accomplished. Finally, I realized that my so-called assistant handled every detail by routing it back to me for questions. Moving her to a different position and hiring a new assistant made a world of difference in my daily work. (This is a sub-tip of hire good help: Fire when necessary!)

5. Hire household help. For some reason—guilt or the superwoman syndrome—women in particular are reluctant to hire help at home. Maybe we think we should be able to handle it all. Guess what? We cannot.

If you live alone, you may need simply a house cleaner two days a week, a person to run errands another day a week, and the choice to eat out most nights. If you run a larger, more complex household, the people you may chose to support you include (and I've employed each of these at some time in the last 15 years) housekeeper, nanny, au pair, handyman, cook, personal assistant, gardener, pool person, contractor. This is not wimping out. This is intelligently magnifying your functional effectiveness. Go for it!

6. Weigh your travel commitments carefully. Especially in academics, the lure of travel can be very seductive when you are looking at your calendar six to 12 months in advance. Sure, I will put together this meeting; sure, I will give this talk. Be certain that the travel you commit to serves your ultimate goal, whether this is building a great practice, being federally funded, or winning Educator of the Year. It's not just the travel time itself, but also the time lost from practice, the family impact of your absence, the coming home tired and unpacking, catching up with all that's piled up on your desk while you were gone, etc.

7. Remember vacations. Especially if you have kids, indulge in at least one vacation a year that is not tied to some business travel. And remember mini-vacations for yourself—dinner with friends, shopping solo, hiking, theatre, museums, music—whatever relaxes you and feeds your soul.

8. Take good care of your own health. That means having a primary care physician and scheduling a yearly visit. Put time for exercise on your calendar and treat it as seriously as any committee meeting. Do the preventive measures appropriate for
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