

THE ENLIGHTENED OFFICE

Time is money

So said Ben Franklin. If you're not using yours wisely, consider hiring some help.

BY CYNTHIA MATOSSIAN, MD, FACS

By definition, the word *efficient* means "achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense." Some years ago I violated this definition in a remarkable way. Because I didn't have an administrative assistant, I finalized my own lecture schedules, made all call backs to businesses and editors and scheduled my own meetings. Consequently, because I was also running a three-office practice and performing surgery, I played constant games of phone tag.

It took one game involving 9 or so back-and-forth voice-mails for me to say, "enough."

300 WATTS OF WISDOM

An uneventful cataract removal takes about 10 minutes; we get reimbursed approximately \$650 if there are no additional payments for advanced technology IOLs or out of pocket procedures. Leaving five voicemails takes about 10 minutes. My use of time epitomized inefficiency.

That one game of tag, played a few years ago, switched on a light bulb. As we made plans to add an administrative assistant to the practice, we decided this person would also help our other eye professionals in the practice. Their time was just as valuable to the practice as mine.

NO TAXATION

I wanted someone with remarkable skills, abilities that went beyond being very organized, detail oriented and multi-tasked-capable. We needed someone who could naturally intuit what was needed, when it was needed, and when she was needed.

"My primary responsibility is scheduling," states Cait Hutton, our current administrative assistant. "In the beginning, there was a lot of trial and error. When doctors are in surgery and unreachable, you have to make decisions, and sometimes they are the wrong decisions.

"We schedule Dr. Matossian out months in advance. You have to learn to schedule meetings at the right pace because you don't want to overtax the physician. Yet you need to schedule efficiently — as many possible meetings on designated meeting days."

Cait even has scheduled me more efficiently during large ophthalmology meetings. My destinations are mapped so I can get from Point A to Point B in the least amount of time, leaving me extra time to get to more events.

EVER-CHANGING DEMANDS

At its core, Cait's role is one of flexibility as the demands are ever changing.

An administrative assistant must be open to assuming varied responsibilities and learning new skills. "When I started, Dr. Matossian was sending her surgical videos, which she uses for her conference presentations, to an outside editing firm. Now I do that. And this year, I will improve my understanding of clinical content to help Dr. Matossian draft lectures."

As the youngest of many siblings, Cait says she had to learn to read people's signals. "I am naturally suited for this position. Dr. Matossian is clear with her instructions, and that makes my job easier; the other physicians require a little more 'reading' on my part."

THE LUXURY OF FOCUS

Since Cait joined us, she has assumed responsibility for preliminary travel schedules, responding to meeting and lecture invitations, and much of our presentation work, like slide decks and videos.

I have more time for patients, for surgery and for participating in clinical trials. Having an administrative assistant allows me to focus on what I should concentrate on: my practice. **OM**



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