



Making the most of your time

In the second part of the series, **Jane Lelean** explores free days, focus days and buffer days, enabling you to be more efficient and profitable in the surgery and still have time for the things you love to do



In this article I am going to show you how to allocate your week to generate an optimum number of 'free days', 'focus days' and 'buffer days', which will enable you to be more effective and profitable in the surgery, get all your admin and strategy planning done and have time and energy to do the things you love to do with the people you love.

As Jim Rohn once said: 'Time is more valuable than money. You can get more money, but you cannot get more time'.

Free, focus and buffer days

I work as a coach with clients from many industries, including dental

practices – most of whom are business owner managers. The vast majority of the business owners are experiencing very similar situations to me, when I ran my practice before I started working with a business coach. My clients are really busy doing the work that generates the fees; they feel that their businesses are controlling them rather than being in charge and setting the direction for their business; and they seldom have the time energy or inclination to do the things they used to enjoy. Consequently, they are often unhealthy, unfulfilled and have unsatisfactory relationships with their family and friends, and often resent the business.

Things really changed for me when my coach, Chris Barrow, introduced me to 'The Entrepreneurial Time System' developed by Dan Sullivan. This system changed the way I worked and gave me my life back. My clients experience similarly remarkable changes and I would like to introduce this simple and effective tool to you.

Dan Sullivan advocates that you divide your time into three types:

- Free days
- Focus days
- Buffer days.

Free days

Free days are full 24-hour periods in which you do not undertake any business-related activity. No planning, no thinking, no calls, no emails, no treatment planning, checking radiographs, or writing referrals.

Nothing. A day off. Free days are sacred and not to be violated. This is time off for you to recharge, re-energise and have fun. Recreation time.

Focus days

Focus days are a 24-hour period in which you spend your time on the activities that create results for your business. These are the days that you generate the fees, providing treatment. On a focus day, you are the provider working '*in* your business rather than *on* your business'. These are the days when you do all your clinical dentistry and fee-earning activities.

Buffer days

Buffer days are the days in which you work '*on* your business rather than *in* it' dealing with all the things that would otherwise distract you from patient care. Choose a buffer day to write your treatment plans, hold your staff meetings and staff reviews, have your coaching sessions and training days and do the strategy work to grow your business. On buffer days, meet with your marketing agency and web designer to promote to practice, write your welcome packs, role play, practice sales conversations and dealing with objections with your staff. Spend buffer days catching up, dealing with problems or learning new skills.

The ideal ratio

There is an ideal and most-effective ratio for free, focus and buffer days that a business owner should be working towards, and that is:

- Free days – three days a week
- Focus days – three days a week
- Buffer days – one day a week.

In my personal experience, and that of many of my colleagues and clients, when you work to this structure you will get the balance back into your life,

and you will work more effectively and profitably.

Just do it!

The most effective way to make this system work is to follow Nike's advice and 'just do it'.

Block the appropriate time out in your appointment books and diaries. So many of my clients spend a long time telling me all the reasons why this cannot possibly work, they are short of fees and can't possibly take time out and still cover the monthly overheads.

I know from experience, I gave Chris all the same objections only to discover that when I did it, I experienced all the benefits Chris said I would, only not as soon as I could have done if I just organised my diary sooner!

If the way your diary is running now is leaving you with insufficient time to do the things you need to do, or the vitality to want to do them, something has to change.

Implementation

This system works by planning your year out ahead of you and to do this you need:

- A year planner from your stationers or download one free from my website, www.healthyandwealthy.co.uk
- Some adhesive dot labels of three colours
- At least three hours of quiet time.

Firstly, choose a coloured label for each day, perhaps:

- Free days – red
- Focus days – green
- Buffer days – blue.

Then use the matrix above to calculate the number of dots you need for each type of day, depending on the number of weeks holiday per year you wish to take.

Start with the holiday and free days and place one dot per day, then allocate the focus and buffer days, until every day has a coloured dot.

Once you have the days allocated they can be transferred into your appointment book and diary.

When allocating your days as free, focus or buffer days, it is vital that you use a system that can be changed, such

Weeks holiday	Weeks working	Free	Focus	Buffer
6	46	180	138	46
7	45	184	135	45
8	44	188	132	44
9	43	192	129	43
10	42	196	126	42
11	41	200	123	41
12	40	204	120	40

as adhesive dots, coloured pencils or map pins. It is important that this system has flexibility to allow you to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. For example, if you are asked to speak at the World Aesthetic Conference (WAC) on a day that falls on a free day, you say 'yes' to the engagement and swap the red dot from that day with a blue one from elsewhere, thus preserving the free time you have and allowing you to take advantage of the opportunity.

Work smart, not long

Some of you will be saying: 'But you haven't explained how this makes me more profitable.' What my personal experience has been, and of all the clients that I have introduced this system, is that when they stepped away from working 'in the business' to three days a week, they become more profitable as a by-product of working more efficiently. By prioritising how they spend those three focus days, they are now working smarter, not longer.

By now you should have an understanding as to why it is not appropriate for you to be working clinically five days a week and then using weekends to run the business.

By following this simple strategy, you will get your life into balance and improve your profitability. If you would like any further advice or assistance with time management or other areas of your practice please contact me.

In part three of the series, which will be published in the next issue of *Private Dentistry*, I will explain how to organise your appointment book to increase your effectiveness and profitability. **PD**

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Jane Lelean will be speaking at Private Dentistry's annual seminar, Private Dentistry Live on Friday 23 October in London. For further information and to book please contact Independent Seminars on 0800 371652 or visit www.independentseminars.com.