

Ep #38: Time Well Spent: Designing Your Clinical Schedule for Success



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hi there, friend. Happy fall, if you're listening to this when this podcast episode first comes out. I don't know about you, but I love the season of fall. Now, it's not the pumpkin spice latte, I can actually either take it or leave it. And fun fact, I actually have a child of mine, my daughter actually works at Starbucks. But I do love the slight decrease in temperature, especially when it's still sunny. I love that that happens in fall.

And while I'm not a fan of too little daylight, I do love how the light kind of hits different here, at least where I live, in the fall. I don't know about you also, but we are full steam ahead at our clinic and the clients are coming fast and furious. It is so fun to see. It is often a time where we're really starting to reset our schedules, or at least this is a time I notice we have a natural opportunity to reset our schedules.

And I know for myself, I'm also in a little bit of a mini-reset of how I spend my time. So today I wanted to talk about intentionally designing your schedule for success so that you can get it all done at work, meaning getting your work all done at work.

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But before I do, did you know I actually have a pretty nice handout, I'd like to say because I created it, that you can actually download for free that can supplement this episode? If you go to our clinicians corner at the Abilities website, and the link will be in the show notes or you can just Google Abilities, you can grab your free download that can serve as your step by step guide to craft your perfect work schedule.

So whether you work for yourself or for someone else, this guide is really designed to help you maximize your time for both personal balance and clinical excellence. So no need to take notes today, sit back, relax and just let me talk you through how to design your clinical schedule for success.

So the first step that I think is most important is to actually schedule a regular time to plan. Now, I like to do it first thing on a Monday morning, but I know others who like to do it on Sunday evening, as an example.

You want to choose a weekly time that works for you, where you can be free of distractions and where you're able and have the ability to use your favorite personal analog or digital calendar, whatever is most important to you. Also, if you're using some kind of scheduling software or your employer is using some kind of scheduling software to book your clinical time, you want to make sure that you have access to that as well.

Now, I like to book 60 minutes on a weekly basis for planning, but in all honesty I can really get it done in 30 minutes, especially now that I've been doing this kind of scheduling schedule for more than 18 months. And in a pinch, if I'm really pressed for time, I could probably do this process in 15 minutes or less.

So you decide what works for you in terms of starting, how much time do you want to allocate for yourself to design your plan on a weekly basis? And I just want to say something is better than nothing and there's no need to bring any perfectionist tendencies here.

So during that weekly time you're going to go to the next step, which is to schedule your personal and free time in your schedule. You really want to make

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a clear distinction between work time and free time, which again, it might be easier if you're working as an employee. But I know even some employees that are clinicians can struggle with this.

So decide ahead of time how many hours you want to work in a week. And then think about what days you want to work. And even in those days, which hours you want to work in the day. Sometimes I see clinicians kind of skipping this part because it seems kind of obvious, but I want to share that actually giving yourself that simple boundary ahead of time can be so helpful to feeling good about the amount of time you want to spend at work.

So then the next step is to schedule your meals and your travel time that you have as part of your week. You want to intentionally put in the breaks at work, as well as the time that you need to safely travel to and from any meetings in your work day.

Now notice that we have scheduled the breaks and that travel before any other meetings and appointments. And the reason that we do that is because breaks are super important for you. You get to decide how much and how many, and to a certain extent when.

Now, again, I know that there's going to be some clinicians who work maybe in a more acute setting. And you might be saying, "Yeah, I get that. But I don't always have the ability to control my schedule." And I agree, no matter what or where the setting where we work, there will always be unexpected things that pop up.

The point is, if you first think about what your ideal schedule would look like, how would you design that ideal schedule that includes breaks for you first? While our brain likes to think that all of the exceptions that we're going to have to this schedule, I want to offer that there is way more routine often in your work than you might initially think there is. And this is a great opportunity to observe your work and see where those routine patterns are here.

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And you also have the opportunity to change the schedule once it's made. Schedules change all the time, especially when we're in a field like we are that involves working with other people. My point is, taking the time in advance to think about what your ideal schedule may want to look like may actually help you in the moment when you need to make those kinds of changes that you need to on the fly.

It helps because you have intentionally thought about the values that are most important to you, which includes both the needs of yourself and how you like to work, as well as your workplace so that you can make a decision that balances both when things tend to go sideways.

So then we want to go to step four, which is to schedule in your meetings and appointments. Now, if you're like me, I often go into my weekly planning with many of my meetings and appointments already booked in advance because I'm definitely booking not always in the same week. I'm booking some of these meetings weeks in advance.

But the difference is, I have made that decision when the person-facing time or the time where I'm going to be meeting with other people is going to be. So whether or not you have client or patient-specific appointments, or you just book a block of time for that client or person-facing time, this is the time when you want to decide when that is best placed.

So then the next step is step five, which is to actually schedule your focus time. This is the step that most clinicians skip, and I want to tell you why you may not want to do that. This is where all of our non-person-facing time, including documentation, happens. And so, of course, we aren't super keen to schedule that kind of thing in. And I hear a couple of reasons why.

First, we often don't like documentation, so we avoid scheduling it almost like it'll go away if it's not on our schedule. And remember, documentation is not my first love either. So I see you, and avoiding something like documentation by not scheduling it in, often makes it feel bigger, not smaller.

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Second, I'll hear something along the lines of I don't know how long something like charting or writing a report will take. I totally understand that point of view, especially when the documentation might be new to you. But our brain will often make whatever time we fit, work for us. And also we may want to see if there's some element of perfectionism going on when we think about those kinds of thoughts.

Most of us, including myself, have procrastinated something and then finally got that thing we were procrastinating done in a relatively small amount of time. I can think of a billion times that that happened in school, for sure. So you may want to question the thought that you have no idea how long something like documentation or charting might take. Maybe you might want to take an educated guess and use it as a learning opportunity to see how close or how far you are with your guess.

The alternative of not deciding ahead of time of how long you want to do something, like finish your documentation, is it's easier to fill that time with other things that feel more important in the moment, or that even just feeling better. Or you might do things like buffering the discomfort of doing the documentation, like talking to your friends, going on social media, doing the things that help us to feel better in the moment and then we're trying to avoid the documentation.

So once we've put in that scheduled time for non-person-facing time, we want to look at step six, which is to allow a certain amount of unexpected urgency time. Now, you get to decide how much that is. But invariably, we know unexpected things are going to come up at work.

And even if you put in 15 minutes one time a week, however much or little time you want to put in there, knowing that you have scheduled some time, some of that extra actual buffer time for those kinds of urgent tasks that you might not have known about in advance can really help you feel more in control of your schedule in the moment when they come up. And then you just need to follow the plan.

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Now, again, sometimes that's easier said than done. Of course, what happens in the week may not look like the way that you planned it when you did your planning time. But it is such an amazing opportunity to really see the difference of what you were planning and then what actually happened, to start to look at those differences almost like a scientist or with the same kind of clinical curiosity you bring to any other kind of assessment.

Having compassion for yourself and seeing those deviations in your schedule as an opportunity to learn can really help you learn what changes you want to make in your schedule in the following week or moving forward. It's the ongoing work because our schedule often changes, as do we. So empowering yourself to decide how you spend your time really is the key factor to getting it all done at work.

I know you can do it. And if you get stuck, I am here to help. Please let me know how it goes. I can't wait to see the impact that you create with these steps. Remember, you can download this step by step design process on our website so I am with you every step of the way. Have an amazing rest of your week and I will see you soon.

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Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to abilitiesrehabilitation.com. See you next week.