

Get Organized for Greater Professional and Personal Productivity

Nina S. Vincoff, MD

Whether it's at a major conference like the RSNA or during a conversation in the reading room, radiologists can learn much from each other. That goes for everything from clinical pearls of wisdom and procedure techniques, to submitting grant applications or applying for promotion.

Our lives today are busier and more complicated than ever. Many radiologists are finding it challenging to stay organized and efficient, but there is much we can learn from either other's experience. I asked radiologist colleagues from across the country these two questions: "What tips or tricks do you have for radiologists who are trying to stay organized and manage competing work and personal commitments? Have you developed a successful system?"

You will see some recurring themes emerge, but you are almost certain to find new ways to enhance your own efforts to stay on track when it comes to meeting your personal and professional obligations.



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My own organizational system relies on four basic principles. My rules might seem rigid, but following them strictly helps me to relax, knowing that I won't forget to do something important, be it professional or personal. Here they are:

- **The power of one.** I keep one calendar and one task list, both synced to my computer and my smartphone. Every professional and personal appointment and task, from attending committee meetings to presenting lectures; from dentist appointments to going out to dinner with friends, goes in one place. By keeping everything in one location, I avoid creating conflicts between work and personal obligations.
- **The power of zero.** I receive dozens of emails a day, but my inbox is always empty. Every email I receive gets immediately filed in folders and subfolders, each carefully labeled. This system allows me to easily locate any email I have ever received. If I send an email that needs follow up, or if I am going to respond later, I set a reminder for myself and then file the original email. I never have to

worry that there is an email in my inbox that needs my attention.

- **Remind me again?** Whenever I agree to do something, personal or professional, I add it to my task list and create an electronic reminder for myself with a due date. Every day, I go through my day's tasks and completely empty the list. If I don't have time to complete a task, I assign it a new due date and reminder. I find that I feel less stressed when I know that I will be reminded about the things I have to do, and don't have to remember everything.
- **Everything goes in the cloud.** I don't keep any documents saved to my desktop, laptop, or smartphone. Instead, I store all my documents in one cloud-based storage application which, like my email, contains many folders and subfolders. This gives me ready access, no matter where I go, to the most up-to-date version of everything I need, whether it's my slide presentations, my CME records, a list of my favorite restaurants or vacation pictures. I never have to worry that I won't have what I need with me.



Kemi Babagbemi, MD, FACR

Continually update your calendar and share it with your partner and household.

Kemi Babagbemi, MD, FACR, associate professor of clinical radiology, Weill Cornell Medical College; vice chair for diversity, equity, and inclusion, Department of Radiology, Weill Cornell Medicine, New York, New York.

I have two school-aged children, one with a developmental disability, and there are many times when my priorities must shift to accommodate personal and professional obligations. In all honesty, as a working mother, I find these areas so intertwined that from minute to minute I could be juggling both—work impacts home and home impacts work. Here are a few strategies that work for me and might work for you:

- **Share calendars.** Continually update your calendar and share it with your partner and household. This allows everyone to plan and manage expectations. It is worthwhile to spend some time at important intervals—the begin-

ning of the school year, the beginning of every month, for example—entering the dates of important family events, doctor appointments, and other activities. As much as possible, I center my calendar around family and personal activities. I may not be able to be present for all that my kids are doing, but it is good to have them on the calendar so I know what I am working around.

- **Practice saying no.** I am getting better at politely refusing invitations to activities that are not aligned with my overall values and priorities at any given time. Although the ability to say no admittedly varies based on each person's stage of life and career, I believe I have now earned the right to decide what I want and need to do. If my immediate reaction to a request or invitation is no, I trust my gut. If I cannot meet the request or invitation, I ask, "Can I recommend someone else?"



Katia Dodelzon, MD, FSBI

Work and life are on the same side. Or should be. One complements and, in fact, enriches the other.

Katia Dodelzon, MD, FSBI, associate professor of clinical radiology, vice chair of clinical operations and associate director of breast imaging fellowship, Weill Cornell Medicine at New York Presbyterian, New York, New York.

- **Integration, not balance.** What I have found to work for me is challenging the inherently flawed nature of the "work-life balance" concept, which implies a zero-sum game. Language matters. As well-meaning as it may be intended, the concept of balancing work and life suggests that adding to one side of the scales automatically takes away from the other. This leads to a constant struggle to contend with the ever-tipping scales in search of a fleeting equilibrium. Work and life are on the same side. Or should be. One complements and, in fact, enriches the other.

- **Leverage your interests.** Finding that which drives and interests me within my work allows

work to seamlessly integrate into and contribute to my life. My interests, which I am fortunate to be able to pursue and explore in an extremely supportive department and institution, thus weave into my day outside of the "9-5" hours. Being passionate about teaching and patient-centered care means that I can look forward to finishing up a paper or reviewing applications after spending an uninterrupted evening playing "Dance, Dance Revolution" with my kids. It also means that I can be the mom who brings physics, medicine, and women in science to life for 20 kindergarteners. My extensive work on developing communication curricula for radiologists equips me with the skills to raise my tenacious and inspiring 9-year-old. Finding that which interests me within the field, a question I want answered, a problem I want solved, a gap that I want filled, allows me the flexibility to integrate my life and work and not pit the two against each other.

Bonnie Litvack, MD, FACR, medical director, Northern Westchester Hospital Breast Imaging, Northwell Health, Mount Kisco, New York.

I have found that looking at “work-life” balance—the holy grail of our time—as a construct rather than a task actually helps make it attainable. Here are some things that I have learned as a mother to three girls, a wife, a daughter, a radiologist, avid healthcare advocate, and a cancer survivor.

• **Control what you can, manage what you can't.**

This philosophy has gotten me and my family through many difficult times. It stops us from dwelling on the unchangeable and keeps us moving our energy toward positive, forward motion.

• **Leverage teamwork.** We all know the value of the healthcare team, but teams are equally essential to our personal lives. Having numerous teams in my life significantly lowers my stress and increases my free time and happiness. Over the years my teams have included family, outside caregivers, professional colleagues, neighbors, and others.

• **Set boundaries.** Say yes to whatever you can whenever you can but put a frame around it. Go ahead and volunteer to be the team parent, the class parent, or the committee chair or director of your department. You can be a leader inside and outside of work if you define the parameters of each position.



Bonnie Litvack, MD, FACR

Control what you can, manage what you can't.

Matthew J. Miller, MD, associate residency program director, Allegheny Health Network; assistant professor of radiology, Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

As radiologists, we benefit from a shift-based work style that allows us to leave work in the reading room when we head home for the day. However, as commitments to leadership roles and projects extend into our personal time, it's important to develop a process for maintaining the balance.

• **Shared calendars.** For me, the No.1 game changer has been a shared calendar. My family and I share a master calendar that contains every personal and professional commitment. We add each item in real time so that scheduling conflicts are kept to a minimum. We have a saying, “If it's not on the calendar, it's not happening,” and we stick to it. The calendar not only contains commitments but also includes my full work schedule. I cover five different

breast imaging centers throughout Pittsburgh, some busier and/or further away from my base of operations than others. This gives us all an idea of when I will become available in the evening after work which helps with planning personal stuff.

• **Separate cells.** I'm fortunate that my home institution provides me with a work phone. I rolled my eyes when I first learned that my home institution would be providing me with a work phone. But in practice, I have found it to be amazing. My work email stays only on my work phone, which stays in my office after I leave for the day. Responding to work email is something that I don't allow to interfere with my family time; it works wonders for vacation. I activate my “out of office” email message, and my work phone doesn't even travel with me. If an emergency does require my prompt attention (it's uncommon, but it happens), my co-workers have my personal cell phone number.



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Mitva Patel, MD

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Mitva Patel, MD, associate professor of radiology, breast imaging fellowship director, and assistant division chief, breast imaging, Ohio State University Medical Center, Columbus, Ohio.

A longtime source of stress for me was the fear that I would miss something important. Indeed, I used to suffer from the “Sunday Night Blues” a vague sense of dread not knowing what I would be walking into at work on Monday morning. I have since found that charting out my work week mentally primes and prepares me for what lies ahead, making me more productive and feeling less stressed as I tackle the week.

- **Go old school.** Like others included in this informal survey, I make extensive use of shared

electronic, app-based calendars, reminders, and to-do lists. However, the most effective tool for me has been the old-school, simple task of setting aside 30 minutes each Sunday to physically write out on paper (a whiteboard works, too!) all meetings, obligations, and deadlines for the week ahead for both myself and my family.

- **Let’s review.** I have also found that stressful surprises and overlapping obligations can be avoided by reviewing and discussing these items in advance with family members. It helps me to create a to-do list at the same time. By knowing where I need to be and what I need to do next, I find myself at greater ease as I navigate my week.



Sherry S. Wang, MBBSI

It is okay to spend time on yourself. Self-care is just as important as caring for others in our personal and professional lives.

Sherry S. Wang, MBBS, department of radiology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota.

- **Integrate work life with home life.** As the parent of a toddler, I find that managing my work and personal life can be difficult, and it is always a work in progress. One thing that has worked for me is integrating my responsibilities as a parent with those of being a radiologist. To me, the idea of work-life balance makes it seem like both are mutually exclusive. But they’re not.

- **Adapt, adapt, adapt.** When my child was very young and slept a lot, he just needed to see and be in the same space as me, and he would be happy. So, I moved my workspace downstairs next to his playpen. Now that he is older, his needs have changed, and he wants me to interact and be accessible to him more often than in the past. How much work, and the type of work, I can complete often depends on his

mood. If he is very cranky and needy, I work when he is asleep. If he can entertain himself, I work in common areas of the house.

- **Get visual.** I have a whiteboard on which I write down all my tasks, projects, and deadlines. This gives me a very visual representation of what and when I need to do each of these. I have found this to be extremely useful to get organized and stay on task.
- **It takes a team.** Getting organized requires help, from both my husband and my radiology squad. This can make working on projects more fun and easier to complete and also confers the accountability needed to help me avoid letting any of them down.
- **Be a little selfish.** It is okay to spend time on yourself. Self-care is just as important as caring for others in our personal and professional lives.

Organization: One Key to a Successful Life

There is no doubt that getting and staying organized is an essential part of success at work and at home. It’s important to take time for yourself, even with a busy schedule. Life is dynamic, not static. Enjoy the ride both at home and at work, regularly reflect and rebalance your priorities, and your life can align with your goals.