

Jane Richardson, Marketing and Programme Manager, British Library

Managing multiple priorities

Jane Richardson has worked for the British Library for five and a half years and is responsible for the strategic marketing of the public programme including exhibitions, permanent collection, events, learning, regional and community programmes. She has led and developed several innovative marketing campaigns, most recently for the Magnificent Maps and Evolving English exhibitions. She has recently led a project to segment the audience for the public programme and is working to embed this within the organisation from both a marketing and programme perspective. She also oversees the public events programme at the Library which includes panel discussions and debates as well as live music, comedy and dance events. Previously, Jane managed the marketing for the Museum of London including playing a major role in the launch of the Museum in Docklands in 2003.

This session looked at how we can manage a mix of priorities - writing inspiring copy, juggling constant targets and multiple events, meeting the needs and expectations of a range of artists, funders, line managers, developing online communities while also focusing on achieving campaign targets, etc. How do you decide on the top priorities? How can you manage your time more effectively in order to achieve these priorities?

The British Library

The British Library is the national library of the UK. Alongside the public programme, it also serves business, researchers and education. It's a large, complex organisation with over 2,000 members of staff. It has a growing collection, which currently stands at around 150 million items, filling over 600km of shelving and growing at 11km per year. There is a branch of the library in Yorkshire employing 1,000 staff where many of the storage facilities are located. The Public Programme consists of two major exhibitions per year. The current exhibition is based on science fiction and later in the year there will be one based on royal manuscripts.

Time management and prioritisation

Time management and prioritisation is very much down to what works best for the individual. There is no magic formula; it's about identifying the tools and techniques that work best for you and your organisation.

By a show of hands, most seminar delegates revealed that they write 'to do' lists. Jane advised delegates not to confuse what they write on the list with what their key priorities are. One useful tip is to identify one main priority that you would like to achieve during the day and to make that your key focus. Another tip is to try to cluster tasks into more manageable pockets of work.

Jane showed delegates a slide of one of her typical ‘to do’ lists:

- Materials for exhibition testing
- Performance management interviews/paperwork
- Gift Aid paper
- Q1 budget review and re-profile
- Marketing Planning for Royal Manuscripts
- Market Research-sign off Q2 survey
- Actions from meeting with the Times
- Sign off copy for e-newsletter
- Input into Box Office project plan
- Set up meeting with curators for 2012 exhibition

Some of the above items are ‘meaty’ tasks which could potentially take a day to complete, and others are simple tasks such as setting up a meeting.

Jane introduced delegates to the work of Stephen Covey and his time management matrix. His system aims to enable people to be more effective rather than merely efficient, and differentiates between **urgent** and **important** tasks:

I M P O R T A N T	<p style="text-align: center;">URGENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Crises</i>: Urgent request for info from Director’s office, problem with artwork for Guardian advert • <i>Pressing Problems</i>: problem with visitor counting system • <i>Deadline driven projects</i>: Exhibition ideas testing- deadline for information to agency today 	<p style="text-align: center;">NOT URGENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Planning</i>: Marketing Planning for Royal Manuscripts exhibition, 2012 planning (market scanning/impact) • <i>Relationship building</i>: Media Partner/partnership development for Royal exhibition and longer term • <i>Recognising new opportunities</i>: future exhibition planning
N O T I M P O R T A N T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Interruptions</i>: colleagues asking for advice • <i>Some email, reports</i>: visitor figure report • <i>Pressing matters</i> • <i>Popular activities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Some email</i>: • <i>Some phone calls</i>: • <i>Time wasters</i>: • <i>Pleasant activities</i>: Reading JAM, Marketing Week

Covey defines an **important** task as one which significantly contributes to you achieving your objectives and an **urgent** one as one which appears to require immediate attention. Emails, phone calls and daily interruptions can all be urgent but aren’t necessarily important. Looking at the above matrix, into which real-life examples from Jane’s work have been inserted to illustrate the point, the top left quadrant contains tasks which are both important and urgent – and these are the

things that require you to act on them. In the top right quadrant are tasks which are important but not urgent – these are things that are important that you devote time to, but not today or tomorrow; they can be diarised days or even weeks ahead. The quadrant in the bottom left contains tasks which are urgent but not important. Covey refers to some of these tasks as ‘popular’ on the basis that allowing people to interrupt you makes you feel more popular. Tasks in this quadrant grab your attention away from the things you are really trying to do. In the bottom right quadrant are tasks which are neither important nor urgent.

Covey then analyses the consequences of spending too much time in these various quadrants (see chart below). If you spend most of your time dealing with things which are both urgent and important (i.e. fire fighting), the consequences are likely to be stress and burnout and not having time to plan or do anything strategic. At the other end of the scale, if you’re spending your time doing things which are neither urgent nor important, Covey argues that you are not doing your job and consequently you might get the sack!

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
I		
M		
P		
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress • Burn-out • Crisis management • Always fire fighting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision, perspective • Balance • Discipline • Control • Few crises
R		
T		
A		
N		
T		
N		
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term focus • Crises management • See goals and plans as worthless • Feel victimised or out of control • Shallow/broken relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total irresponsibility • Fired from jobs • Dependent on others or institutions for the basics
T		
I		
M		
P		
O		
R		
T		
A		
N		
T		

It’s important to work out how much time you are going to spend in the urgent and important quadrant. Most people in the arts spend a good deal of time fire fighting, so will inevitably find themselves in this quadrant quite a lot of the time. One strategy is to cut back on the amount of time you spend in the urgent but not important quadrant in favour of spending more time in the important but not urgent quadrant. Shifting the focus in this way can lead to significant improvements; Covey argues that even spending 1% more of your time in the planning quadrant will make you more productive in your work. Allowing ourselves to think and plan ahead should reduce the number of crises happening in the urgent and important quadrant. You will also achieve more job satisfaction if you are able to plan more.

A study at the University of California in 2005 found that on average, office staff could work for about 11 minutes without being interrupted. An example from my own working day illustrates this: I might begin the day with the intention of doing some marketing planning for a forthcoming exhibition. About half an hour into the task, a colleague interrupts me asking for 10 minutes of my time to get my opinion on some market research they are thinking of commissioning. This 10 minutes turns into 20 minutes. Straight afterwards, I pick up the phone to call an agency for some distribution which urgently needs doing. I then make the mistake of going into my emails to find a senior colleague wants some urgent statistics about an exhibition so I do it there and then, which takes me another 20 minutes. By this time, I'm feeling very distracted from the task I set out on at the beginning of the day and so I decide to go and get a cup of tea. En route to the staff café, I bump into a colleague and have a very productive conversation with them, but another 20 minutes has gone by. This illustrates the amount of interruptions we come across in our daily life. So let us focus on how to identify these interruptions and minimise their impact on our working lives. It's important to recognise that we ourselves are sometimes actively seeking interruptions. The trick is not to allow an interruption to become a distraction.

Some strategies for tackling interruptions:

- Change your environment. Find a quiet room if possible or even work from home if you are able to. Also, identify the times of day when you are most productive as these are the times when you are likely to make most headway on your important tasks. Getting into work an hour early is also very useful – before interruptions start from colleagues, phone calls etc. Another answer is to use headphones to help you 'zone out'.
- Email. Consider turning off the preview pane that pops up on some email packages; consider not even logging into your email until a certain time of day; don't let emails impact on your most productive time of day; it's easy to become a slave to emails; good practice is to file or delete emails after being dealt with rather than allowing them to build up.
- Meetings. If you are calling the meeting, ask yourself whether it is really necessary; ask yourself whether you are inviting the right people along; plan the meeting ahead and ask yourself what it is you want to achieve from the meeting; clarify the meeting's purpose from the beginning so that everybody knows what the purpose is; at the end, recap what you've agreed.
- Learn how to say 'No'. This is difficult, particularly in the arts where we inherently often have a 'can do' attitude. Try not to apologise; keep your apology simple rather than giving a convoluted reason. Use their interruption as an opportunity for them to help you on a project, or suggest an alternative person who might be better placed to help. Consider whether your own work is actually more important than the interruption – sometimes

the interruptions can be more central to your core work than what you were spending your time on. If it's your manager who is interrupting you, put the decision back to them – ask them to decide on how they want you to prioritise your time if it appears difficult and clarify the likely consequences/outcomes of a particular course of action.

- Be honest
- Be collaborative
- Be brave

Other tips include:

- Use a diary planner: outlook or other form and consider blocking off chunks of time in your diary for key tasks
- Your manager. It can be extremely useful to admit to your manager that you feel overloaded and need help establishing priorities. Employees often fail to do this because they feel it may reflect badly on them, but managers aren't mind-readers and such an approach can help deal with a project much more effectively than if it goes wrong and then needs people to fire fight the consequences. It's part of a manager's job to ensure his or her staff are working to their full potential, and working towards achieving the organisation's objectives.
- Your colleagues
- Influencing bigger picture changes. Think about whether processes in your organisation can be changed or streamlined. Eg. I recently pushed through a change to reduce the number of hard copy newsletters/brochures that were being produced throughout the year – which has both helped reduce marketing costs and lessen duplication, but I had to 'sell' the organisational benefits of this idea to programming colleagues as it affected their deadlines.

In conclusion:

- ACCEPT - there are never enough hours in the day - this seems particularly true of the arts sector
- UNDERSTAND - lack of time is linked to a lack of planning, difficulty saying No and inability to manage interruptions
- REMEMBER - Work Life balance. This is really important – life and work can become very blurred when you work in the arts.
- Find out what works for you. Use whichever of the tools/techniques will be most useful from the ones that have been presented in this session.

- Take baby steps. Don't try to radically change everything you do overnight – when you return to work after this session, think about introducing maybe one or two of these tools, whichever you feel will be most beneficial to you.

Feedback from Group Sessions

Delegates attending the seminar were asked to form groups and to discuss what works best for them, what they consider best practice, and what they find particularly difficult in managing time and priorities.

Their feedback was as follows:

Tidy your desk/workspace. Psychologically, coming in on a Monday morning and knowing that you have a clear desk space is very empowering.

Avoid being pestered by advertisers calling all the time: one team sets an hour aside during the day when they will speak to advertisers, and will not speak to them outside of that hour.

Do not underestimate the value of going for a cup of tea: Take time to get up from your desk, clear your head, get away from your workspace for a while.

Manage the expectations of the people you work with: We feel as if we say 'yes' to everything and it's just too much. Instead of jumping to carry out a task if someone asks you to do it at the last minute, learn to explain that you can't do it now but give them a time when you can do it.

No matter what technological advances there are (e.g. Google Calendars), there's nothing to beat the good old post-it note on the screen!