



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Time in a Bottle

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

With apologies to Jim Croce, this column is not about preserving the moment. It is about *finding* the moments. UCAOA recently did a member survey asking about various capabilities we have (JobBank, Article Search, Lecture Library, Online Forums, etc.) and whether you are using them—and if not, why not?

The overwhelming “why not” has turned out to be... *time*. It’s not that the resources aren’t great, it’s just that the day is already so full that by the time you remember the resources exist you are already in the car on the way home after a long day.

We get it. If you are familiar with Steven Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989)—and even if you aren’t—you realize that you spend most of your day on either “not important, urgent” activities such as interruptions, impromptu meetings, etc., or at best on “important, urgent” activities like crisis management and deadline-driven projects.

The area that gets neglected, to the detriment of your center, is the “important, not urgent” one.

Activities in this category include relationship building, planning and strategy, and professional development—things that will not put you out of business today if neglected, but may indeed do that in the long run.

We are all likely “guilty” of neglecting this area. It’s extremely difficult not to neglect it. It takes incredible discipline to set aside, even for a day, the time you need to attend to these activities. Sadly, they often need more than just one day, so when you do get to them, they are still getting the short end of your stick.

It also demands culture change for your staff and colleagues to realize that these kinds of activities are just as important, if not more so, than you taking time to deal with *their* problem at that moment. They have to learn to man-

age without you sometimes so you can do the activities that *only you* can do.

If they sold time in bottles next to the vitamin-enhanced water, this would be no big deal. But of course, they don’t. You have to manufacture it yourself. (Actually, you have to steal it.)

“Try to find, steal, borrow, or make time to invest in your center.”

The three or four days you have stolen from some other activity to attend the National Urgent Care Convention, for instance, must be paid back somehow. Will that time be paid back in the time/resource/money-savings information you pick up at the meeting? That’s the goal, but we recognize it is still a sacrifice.

There are no easy answers to this. All of the answers are hard in *The Moment*. It’s hard to let the call go to voicemail. It’s hard to ignore the e-mail popping up. It’s hard to wonder what’s going on outside your door while the staff has been told that you are in a meeting. But, these are choices that must be made as investments in your organization’s future—or you are just running around like the proverbial chicken without a head (and let’s hope you don’t try to cross the road).

As a word of encouragement, know that it *can* be done. I had the pleasure of visiting two sets of centers recently that were going through their Joint Commission site visits, and they had made the time to really step back and look at their processes and how they could be better. There are some exemplary leaders and staffs at work in those centers, but they all acknowledged how incredibly difficult it was to find time to do that kind of introspection and examination, though it was ultimately worth it.

This spring, try to find, steal, borrow, or make time to invest in your centers. We all know it will be time well spent toward your success in the future, if only in retrospect. ■



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