

## When You Have Very Little Time

*Be with what is  
so that what is to be may become.*  
Soren Kierkegaard

*Instead of waiting for the perfect opportunity,  
I should work toward a realization  
that every opportunity is perfect.*  
Suzan-Lori Parks

Does this sound familiar?

- You are called to instruct an inpatient on a cholesterol-lowering diet. You have not seen him before and when you arrive in the room he is all packed and ready to leave.
- You work in an outpatient clinic and are asked to get a patient to follow her diabetic diet. Her ride is coming in 20 minutes.
- In your private practice a new patient with a complicated medical and diet history says she is only willing to come for one visit.

These are all situations where the **expectations are unreasonable**. You are being asked to accomplish something without adequate time to do the job that you are trained and capable of doing. (Some of these clients may have no intention of listening to you or making any changes at all, but that's a whole other Tip.)

My first suggestion is to **take a deep breath**. Breathing is an essential element of letting go of what we can't control. (See Tip # 33)

**Clarify the limitations:**

- "Your doctor asked me to talk with you about how to eat when you get home. How much time (and energy) do you have right now to learn about this?"
- "So, you are saying that this 60 minute session is all you are ready for. Is this for financial or time reasons? Would it help to know that your insurance company covers three visits? Or that I often do half sessions after the first one and we can spread them out in a way that works for you?"

Maybe add **what you know from your experience** about the time it takes to accomplish all you believe this person needs.

- "Generally, I find it takes about 45 minutes to address this fully.
- "I'd be glad to help you make these changes. From my experience, it will take us 3 to 6 visits to address all your needs about this."

**Negotiate** for what time you have and then **accept** it:

- "Is your ride willing to wait? For how long?"
- "I hear that 15 minutes is all you have today."
- "OK, so we'll see what I can do for you in this hour."

Ask at least a few questions to **unpack what is important** to this person **right now**. This step is essential so that you and the client won't waste time. Even if you (and the doctor) believe that information about high-sodium foods is important, if the patient doesn't think so you will waste time instructing on a low-sodium diet. (See Tips # 20 for more ideas on unpacking meaning)

- "It would help me to find out what you know already about your condition (or the diet)"  
"what is bothering you most about this?"
- "Is there something you don't understand and want my help with?"

Find and agree on **one thing** that would be most helpful. Maybe list some of the things you could offer in that time.

- "I often help people understand how to cope if their blood sugar goes low or how to time meals and snacks in order to feel their best."
- "I have some handouts on label-reading. Or, we could focus on how to choose foods on menus. Since we can't get to all of it, what would be most useful today?"

**Provide** the one thing you and the client have agreed on.

Offer **resources** for the future. You are acknowledging that you have not completed the job, only accomplished one small thing:

- "I know we had limited time today. I'd be glad to work with you again on this. I'm here in clinic every Monday. You could ask to see me as soon as you get in next time."
- "Here's a card for a dietitian in private practice in your area. When you are ready, she's great at helping people adjust to this new way of eating."

Finally, if you are frequently expected to accomplish too much in too short a time, this is a recipe for burnout! (Check out Tip # 22 Detecting and Avoiding Burnout.)