Eat that Frog! Time management techniques to improve radiology workflow efficiency.
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DISCLOSURE:
WE HAVE NO ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST IN RELATION TO THIS PRESENTATION.
Introduction:

As the workload of clinical radiology continues to increase, it is becoming more and more crucial for radiology services to improve efficiency while maintaining and improving quality.

Establishing or developing an efficient workflow may require unique adaptations to address the vast number of challenges and factors which must be considered to complete the day's work.

One of the most famous books on productivity to date is "Eat That Frog!" by Brian Tracy, in which a number of time management, motivations and productivity techniques are presented for generalized tasks.

Many of the concepts discussed may be applied to radiology services to improve workflow.
Concept behind “Eat that Frog!”

“...if the first thing you do each morning is to eat a live frog, you can go through the day with the satisfaction of knowing that that is probably the worst thing that is going to happen to you all day long” – Mark Twain

Author Brian Tracy adopted Mark Twain’s quote to describe a productivity technique in his book “Eat That Frog!: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time”

In the context of productivity, the frog represents an unpleasant or difficult task which may be prone to procrastination given the unpleasant nature of the task.

Completing said task will not only progress past that particular task, but will allow for more efficient handling of tasks to come.
Concept behind “Eat that Frog!”

It has been found that multiple factors contribute to productivity and procrastination, including intrinsic factors unique to the individual as well as external factors related to the tasks at hand.

Completing the most challenging or unpleasant task, “eating the frog,” at the start of the work day provides the reassurance that the worst part of the day has been completed, as a result, one is more likely to have a positive approach to the rest of the day.
How to “Eat the Frog”: first, find your frog

In order to apply the technique, one must pick their frog for the day.

It is important to properly prioritize tasks and pick out the most important tasks. Tracy devised a grading system to organize tasks on an ABCDE scale:

A: A task that must be completed or else there will be serious consequences. These tasks are prime candidates to be selected as the frogs.

B: A task which should be done but only has mild consequences if not done.

C: A task which could be done, but there are no consequences at all for not doing it.

D: A task you can delegate to someone else, freeing up more of your time for A tasks.

E: tasks which do not have to be done and can be eliminated altogether.
How to “Eat the Frog”: Start eating

Take action immediately.

“Failure to execute” has been identified as one of the greatest problems in organizations today.

“If You Have to Eat Two Frogs, Eat the Ugliest one First”

Do not stop until the task is completed.

Completion of the most difficult task early in the day provides more time for enjoyable task later in the day.

Some theories support the notion that work is more productive at the start of a session, such as the attention decrement which posits primacy effect may allow for higher efficiency in the first tasks of the day. As a result it would stand to reason that the most difficult task should be handled at the time when one works with the greatest efficacy.
How to “Eat the Frog”: Frogs in radiology

There are a number of tasks in a radiology service workflow which fall into the A grade. These tasks vary for each aspect of the service.

While a radiologist may have a different list of priorities from a nurse, a CT technician, a resident radiologist or a referring physician, certain common values are always shared such as the care and management of emergent patients.

It is often most important to place patients in the ER or stroke patients into the A/B category. Very rarely will there be tasks higher in priority.

Hosting common priorities can merge and align efforts across the entire department to provide efficient care.
How to “Eat the Frog”: Tasks in radiology

In addition to focusing the department’s efforts, identifying tasks for delegation and delegating said tasks can greatly improve efficiency.

As people work through their high priority tasks, other important task may be left unattended. However, if tasks which can be delegated are identified, it may be addressed quicker by another member of the department who has finished their tasks.

Sharing and delegation of task in a coordinated fashion can save a great deal of time and complete more work in a given time.
“Eat the Frog”: potential pitfalls

The Eat the Frog technique as described by Tracy is a rigid system in which the user must exhibit a great deal of discipline and compliance in completing a selected plan.

While this may be without issue in some fields, the workflow in medicine is often unpredictable with many changing priorities. It may not be possible or acceptable to employ the technique in its original rigid manner.

For example, if you set out to complete a reviewing and dictating a complicated case in the emergency room, but a new time sensitive emergency arises during that time, it may not be wise to delay addressing the new case.

A degree of flexibility must be incorporated into employing such a technique.
Summary

Identifying and prioritizing tasks as important and delegating tasks among a radiology service can allow for greater efficiency in completing tasks.

Starting with the most important/difficult task first can allow for that task to be addressed with more efficiency than if it were addressed later in the day.

Some flexibility must be incorporated into the Eat the Frog technique as the radiology work flow may not allow for such a rigid adherence to the technique.

Utilizing effective time management and productivity techniques can improve a radiology services efficiency, allowing radiologist to meet the increasing workload of clinical imaging without compromising quality.
Sources:


Erik Peper, Richard Harvey, I-Mei Lin, and Padma Duvvuri. Increase Productivity, Decrease Procrastination, and Increase Energy. Biofeedback 2014 42:2, 82-87
