



Flexibility . . . You've Got to Work Hard . . .!

I asked a registered nurse educated in the nursing field several decades back, as I was explaining the topic for my latest HBIA newsletter piece if she knew anything about my subject.



"Do you know anything, offhand, about the importance of routine/scheduling, in the life of an individual with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)?"

Her reply established a foundation for my piece:

"Only that ABI people function better with routine . . . incidentally, so do folks on the autism scale . . . likely to do with lessened ability of brain to arrange, sort and prioritise actions, emotions, etc. . . . like it is more difficult to "sequence" activities."

In reading 'Brain Injury Blog --- the Importance of Routine,' from Janelle Breese Biagioni, I was reminded that routines are important for everyone. This includes everyone from business people to children, entrepreneurs, writers and other artists. Similarly, routine and schedule are necessary, and important, for parents and individuals in rehabilitation.

It is understood that, though people tend to resist routine at one time or another, it is simply part of the human experience. A person may feel she or he is in a rut, perhaps, and they simply need a pause, to break from the daily bustle. Inevitably, however, they will return to a routine even if it is different from the prior.

Why are routines important? Clearly, doing things in the same way over and over again enables us to accomplish more in a day, reduces anxiety and stress, as well as teaching others (and ourselves) to respect our time.

Off the top of my head and from personal and professional experience, I know the importance of routine and scheduling, in my former capacity as an elementary school teacher, as well, clearly, as time spent , as a student embarked on various study programs.

The teacher must schedule his or her time, in efforts to best inform and educate a wide range of learning ability within their students, as well, of course, in their own requirements, as set by the school district that they are employed by.

The individual whose study I used for this writing was a contractor.

As a self-employed contractor, Ms. Biagioni wrote, it is important for her to stay on routine. She juggles many projects and in order that she not forget where she is at, or when she needs to have something completed, she maintains her "Critical Path," her routine that is mapped out for weeks at a time documenting the topic she is writing about. What day does it need to be written for and for whom she is writing. Her critical path is on a calendar and it sits on her desk. She looks at it on the daily and her project schedule is determined by what is written on the calendar. By its nature, she is required to have a no-budge policy around it.

Of course, it is not set up so that she cannot allow herself some flexibility, nor that she would abandon loved ones in an emergency. We all must build in breaks and downtime and if a surprise situation arises that must be tended to, she does.

She picks back up right where she left off, though and, unless there is a VERY good reason to change the routine, she doesn't. People ask all the time, "How do you do all that you do?" The answer? Routine. If Biagioni did not use this system, she would procrastinate in the same way that others do.

Generally speaking, several common routines may be discussed or included (Morning Routine, for instance, brushing teeth, combing hair, get dressed, make coffee and breakfast, review calendar appointments).

A Meal Routine can enlist setting the table, preparing the food, clearing and washing dishes, cleaning the kitchen counter, sweeping the kitchen floor, etc.

My own routine, aside from already-scheduled HBIA meetings, and going to work, morning and afternoon, during the school year, also includes my own household chores.

My chore schedule, for instance, includes taking the trash out, when need be, as well as separating recycled goods from garbage.

I feed the dog, precisely at 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. each day. At around 1:45, I walk, on near two-kilometre route, with the dog, to fetch the mail.

Wednesdays and Saturdays are set aside, for sweeping the house and mopping. I vacuum, as well.

You will add more actions to the above-stated categories, actions that are or will grow meaningful to the person. Be certain not to overwhelm the individual, particularly at the

beginning, with list after list of routines, immediately upon their return home, from hospital. This is a slow process and it may be preferable to work on one or two routines (morning and bedtime routines, for instance). You are more likely to be successful at instilling these routines in a step-by-step manner, such as this. Eventually, yes, you will be able to include everything, or all of the routines.

Be sure to offer acknowledgment and encouragement of success as the person continues their move toward independence. Rehabilitation is hard work; often, however, the individual will not see all of their personal successes and gains.

Pointing out the newly-recovered or recovering patient's successes today, things that they were not able to do, recently, is its own reward. These observations and realizations can keep a person motivated and certainly can inspire them.

You've got to work hard . . .!!

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