

dear residents

Managing Distraction

January 28, 2024

Dear Residents,

Many years ago, I came across an article in The Onion, [Area Man Makes It Through Day](#). It was satire at its best. What I remembered most was “*Experts estimate that, by 10 p.m. Tuesday night, Blume had survived exposure to approximately 1,700 advertising images of epic banality.*” At the time (2008), this number seemed like calculated hyperbole, but lately I think this may be closer to the actual number of emails, phone calls, pages, text messages, inbasket messages, social media posts, Instagram stories, and Epic Chat messages that vie for your daily attention.

Lisa Rosenbaum has authored a few recent perspectives [1-3] in the NEJM attempting to reframe wellbeing and understand resident angst. She worries that the narrative of wellbeing and its association with a difficult work environment is detracting from meaning and joy in work. For once, I found myself not on the same page as Dr. Rosenbaum. It may not be just service oriented patient care work that is reducing joy and meaning in work – it may well be all the excess cognitive load from mandatory training modules, the incessant Epic Chat, the additive nature of all that is expected of us – answer this, do that, comply with this, finish that. Not to mention the insidious alert fatigue we experience courtesy of our electronic devices. We do care about our patients, and we will gladly do anything to keep them comfortable, scour outside records, communicate with family, facilitate safe discharge, etc. I don’t think we are angry about that – we are simply burdened with a system that has created unnecessary complexity.

A few days ago, Seth Godin blogged on [Communication Hygiene and the Demise of Texting](#) imparting his frank flair to what has been plaguing me (and I expect you) lately. Anyone can reach you (no Application Programming Interface [API] is needed). As Seth says, *the asymmetry of the dynamic here sows the seeds of the demise. It’s up to every single person you know to protect your attention, up to each of them to be generous and discreet and not waste your time. And the cost of them simply doing what everyone else is doing is so low that the whole thing begins to degrade.* One applicant emailed me several times requesting an interview – then direct messaged me on Twitter, then sent a message on Facebook Messenger, then texted me, then called my phone, and then sent a letter through the mail. Finally, this applicant crafted a 2-minute video message. When for the nth time I responded with the politest “thank you for your interest, but...” the applicant’s last message was a petulant “I’m sorry that I wasted a signal on UTSW.” Yikes!

I was on the edge, but I finally did it - I deleted my Twitter and Facebook accounts. I’ve almost sworn off online shopping – convenient as it is – because of the obligatory email barrage after a one-time purchase. I have [Nomorobo](#) on my phone to block spam calls and I downloaded [Permission Slip](#) to remove my data from various warehouses. It’s a losing battle, I admit, but I am trying.

I am also trying to limit what comes your way – The chiefs place all announcements, surveys, and opportunities in the residents’ digest, and I am (still) working with GME to streamline the administrative tasks that come your way. Next week, I am meeting with the Epic team to negotiate some constraints around Epic Chat. The average daily volume of Epic Chat is now upwards of 200 messages/day/person.

Creating “focus time” and “setting boundaries” are routinely recommended in executive coaching programs. Well, that works for executives, but what about for residents – you cannot do that when you are first call, but there may be other opportunities to create quiet time, unplug from devices and replace FOMO with [JOMO](#) (the Joy of Missing Out). I’ve been Facebook and Twitter free for about 3 weeks now – I’ve had a few twinges of regret – but I’m beginning to feel the JOMO.

PS: When you reach out to me – it’s signal not noise. Please know that my primary job is to be there for you.



[Crown of Thorns](#) (native to Madagascar) – my sister’s garden, Karachi, Pakistan

Warm wishes for a joyful week,

Dino Kazi