Today has been “one of those days”... an unsuspecting drive into work and one meeting on the morning’s agenda turns into a day of chaos. We have all experienced those days when, by the time you realize that you forgot to eat lunch, even more folks drop by your office and more issues require your immediate attention than you can remember, and it is still only 1:30 in the afternoon. Working at a university is like most other salary-based jobs; these “days” are more common than not. Many important items need your immediate attention and energy, and once you find a few moments to shut your door and focus, your mind tends to decompress with unimportant items that are not urgent.

These days are mentally taxing, yet they are also quite enjoyable. Being an active participant and a resource among the rich diversity of minds and creative thinkers on a university campus is what makes our jobs enjoyable. However, as a new faculty member, I have to ask myself at the end of the day, “Am I on track to make tenure?” If I am not, this opportunity to be a resource to my state and to engage with the academic environment will be short lived. For the graduate students, you have to continuously ask yourself, “Am I on track to successfully defend my research? Will I be competitive in the job market after graduation?” If not, then a career change might be closer than you think.

So, how do I manage my time in the midst of this chaos? What simple “rules,” if any, can I bear in mind every day to keep the current of impromptu events from adding resistance to my goals of being a valuable resource, bringing innovative ideas to my university and discipline, and making tenure? A while back, a good colleague and friend introduced me to Covey’s Grid for Time Management.