

Time Management Guidebook

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Living a balanced life isn't just about time management, but better time management helps. Let's take a mindful approach to it and see how many more hours you can bring to your week!

You Always Have A Choice

First of all, you must understand that you, and you alone, are responsible for how you choose to spend your time. No one is forcing you to dry your hair. No one is forcing you to bake cup cakes for the fundraiser. No one is forcing you to have a crumb-free floor. No one is forcing you to do your job. No one is even forcing you to feed your children even (though child services could take them away from you if you don't).

My point is not to neglect these things if they are important to you. But to understand that you always have a choice, especially in how you spend each and every minute of your day.

Time is precious and our greatest commodity. In order for time to work for you, you have to move out of being the victim of time, and instead be the creator of it. For me, that starts by reminding myself that I always have a choice in how I use my time. In fact, I have moved away from saying "I don't have time for this" or "I can't find the time for that." The truth is that "I choose not to spend the time on this right now (or at all)" or "I have chosen not to find time for this yet."

Work Expands To Fill The Time Allotted For It

To choose the best way to spend your time, it's important to understand Parkinson's Law: "Work expands to fill the time available for its completion." That's why before I had children I was going in early then working past 7pm many nights. But when I went back to work after my first son was born, I couldn't start until 9am and had a hard stop at 5:45pm every night due to our childcare schedule. Even with these reduced hours, I got at least the same amount of work done, often times much more.

It's why deadlines work great for me. If I give myself 5 weeks to get a project done, it will take 5 weeks. If I give myself 5 days to get it done, it will take 5 days. Start giving yourself short deadlines (especially for things you tend to procrastinate on) at work and home and get to work to get them done in the time you plan for yourself. Many successful executives have told me over the years, "Done is better than perfect."

Upright And Steady

Just as you choose how you spend your time, you choose what balance means in your life, from day to day. Balance does not mean that every aspect of your life is proportionately even to the others. In fact, this will never be so. The definitions of balance that I like best are “a condition in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions.” We are going for *correct proportions* here, not equality.

Yet another definition of balance says “the distribution of weight enables someone or something to remain upright and steady.” Upright and steady. What does a life that is upright and steady look like to you? To YOU? Because a balanced life will look as different as each of our finger prints. In order to start creating a life that you love, you must understand what you specifically value. Not what your parents want you to value. Not what your neighbor values. Not even what I suggest you value based on my experiences. You must be true to yourself or you will not stay in balance and flow.

To start identifying your values, go back to the list of “Who Am I” that you wrote for Chapter 1 at the beginning of our work together. As you look through what you wrote down, circle the 5 - 8 roles that are most important to you, then order them in terms of priority. And this should be priority of what you want, what makes your heart feel good, not the priority that currently place on things as you are running from demand to demand, putting out fires and barely keeping your head above water.

Study your list. As you begin to take ownership and choice of how you spend your time, remember what’s most important to you. And do understand that circumstances happen and life changes. At one point in my life, being a yoga teacher was a top 5 role that I valued. After my children were born, it moved off my priority list, then up to low but present priority when my boys were out of preschool. And while my family is a priority over my work, there are still times that I have to work early or late, yet choose to commit quality time to my family later to balance out the present moment choices.

Remember, balance is a continual fluctuation. Have you ever held a balancing pose in yoga class, like tree pose? To the human eye, it may look like you are standing still, in perfect balance. But you as the yoga practitioner know there is no stillness to the balance. Different muscles are firing and shifting and adjusting and changing every breath in order for you to stay standing tall in that tree pose. When you start to shift off balance, you move back to center and re-ground. It’s a constant flowing evolution.

How Do You Want To Feel?

Beyond roles or externally linked values like your family or your health or financial freedom, I want you to align with feeling states that you can value.

Consider how you want to feel in life. Do you want to feel free, joyful, creative, love, independent, like a leader, inspiring, calm, peaceful, ease, audacious, bold, willing, humble, wise, faith, organized, play, fun, open? How do you want to feel in the life that you are creating for yourself?

Identify 3 words describing a feeling state that you value. You can even write them in priority order. Now, when you need to make decisions about how you choose to spend your time, you can ask yourself, “Will doing these dishes right now make me feel _____?” Or, “Will managing this nonprofit volunteer project next week make me feel _____?” Or even, “What would make me feel more _____, going for a run or working on my novel or sleeping in?”

The more you take steps in line with how you want to feel, the better you’ll feel and the clearer it will become how to spend your time going forward. You’ll also begin to attract more things that bring this feeling state into your life.

What Gets Measured Gets Improved

I heard this quote often in my corporate career. It can be applied to all areas of your life, even time. It aligns with the universal wisdom that the first step to change is awareness. So if you want to make better choices about how you use your time, you must bring clear awareness to it by measuring it.

Having read all sorts of time management books and articles over the years, one of my favorite views on measuring your time comes from Laura Vanderkam who wrote a book on this very subject called, “I Know How She Does It.”

In her book, Vanderkam suggests that you track everything that you spend your time on in 30 minute increments for a whole week. There are many free or inexpensive apps you can use to do this, or a plain spreadsheet works too. She then advises to go back over your time and put a check mark next to everything that makes you feel energized or excited, put an X next to anything that drained you, and finally put a W next to those things that you felt were a waste of time (like driving to the post office only to find it closed, or perusing a swim suit catalog when you have no intention of buying a swimsuit).

Then Vanderkam explains to go back to your Xs to determine how you can eliminate, delegate, or minimize these tasks. And take each one on with some scrutiny. Must you *really, really* attend that project update meeting your coworker scheduled, or would reviewing the progress via email be more efficient?

Vanderkam then asks you to examine your Ws and brainstorm ways you can make this perceived wasted time more meaningful. Could you pick up a book and read before bed vs. scrolling through Instagram? Can you listen to an audio book on a skill you’d like to enhance for

your leadership position while commuting to work? Can you invite a girlfriend to run errands with you so you can catch up and be there for each other while checking off your to-do list?

By studying how you spend your time for a week you will be activating the Hawthorne Effect that says the simple act of paying attention to a behavior causes you to improve your performance in that area. Pay attention and experience a better use of your precious time!

Plan For Success

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

If we approach our day with no plan we tend to do what’s easy and react to other’s needs vs. carrying out our own important work. We start with email when our brain is freshest and most creative wasting productive hours. We check social media in between tasks because we aren’t sure which task to tackle next and before we know it a quick glance at Facebook or LinkedIn has eaten up 20 minutes of our day. We must plan our time to be most productive.

Every Sunday night or Monday morning I look at the week ahead and schedule in all my workouts and self care activities for the week, I identify childcare and shuttling needs if they are not already taken care of, and then compare schedules with my husband to balance out our family’s responsibilities to both of our work and personal schedules. It ensures that A) I get my sanity taken care of by a daily workout and B) Nothing gets missed and C) I don’t get to the end of the week and feel resentful that I took on more than my husband.

Of course, things come up during the week and my schedule will shift, but flexibility around a plan is much more peaceful than shoot-from-the-hip chaos.

On Sunday night or Monday morning, I also make a weekly To-Do list for my work and three biggest goals. This helps clear my brain by getting everything on paper, and it helps me prioritize my focus. From this list, I highlight the most important items that will move my goals forward, and schedule them into my week early in the days. This ensures I spend time on things that will actually move my dreams and goals forward vs. just reacting to my inbox or spending time on things that feel urgent.

I also number this list in priority order of importance and urgency. When its time to work, I put my head down and bang out #1. I work til its complete (taking brain refreshing breaks as needed.) Once #1 is finished, I look at my list and move onto #2 and tackle it whether I feel like doing it or not. This helps me stay energized by accomplishing the hard tasks firsts, and doesn’t lead me down the social media rabbit hole of, “Hmmm... what should I do next? Let me just see what’s happening on Instagram first.”

Every day I revisit the weekly list and have my top 3 to 4 tasks listed out in priority order and ready to go.

Buffer Time & Over-Scheduling

Feeling rushed makes us anxious. Anxiety drains our energy and our peace. So its very important to build a buffer into your schedule. By tracking your time for a week you will have a more realistic understanding of how long activities actually take you to get done. You can also plan in buffer space like 30 minutes of “arriving home from work time” rather than allocating the first 30 minutes you walk in the door to dinner prep.

From here, it’s time to break your habit of over-scheduling yourself and your kids.

To do this, you must first understand that your value is not derived by how much you get done. Yes, we want to live a full life and be productive and work on our dreams, but none of these things matter if we are not enjoying the journey, if we are not finding peace in the process. One of the quickest ways to steal away your peace is by over-scheduling.

Begin to question if the commitments, activities, and tasks you plan into your day are aligned with your values and the way you want to feel. Understand that successful people like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs schedule thinking or other down time into their days so they can keep their creative juices and problem-solving abilities flowing. Busy has been worn as a badge of honor in our society for a very long time, but the most successful among us are not running around busy. They are intentional with their time and protecting it carefully for only the tasks or projects that are aligned with their goals and bring them joy.

Practice Saying No

In order to stop over-scheduling yourself, you will have to learn the successful skill of saying no. This can be especially hard for women, since many girls have been raised to be people pleasers, to give like a martyr, to do, do, do and put a grin on our frazzled face saying, “Thank goodness for coffee!”

Saying no is a skill that we must learn. Any new skill, like baking or sewing or even riding a bike, is learned through practice. Think about where and how you can practice the necessary skill of saying no.

Start with something easy that you generally say no to anyway. Go to a PTA meeting that you didn’t even plan on attending, one where you know the leaders will ask for volunteers. Sit on your hands, bite your lip, and don’t say a thing. If someone asks you to join their committee, say no. Hang out with the lunching crew at work right around lunch time. When they invite you to join them, say no. Little by little, the more you say no, the better you will be at this skill.

A friend once told me that she will never commit to anything until 24 hours later. Raised to be a people pleaser, she had to add in this extra time layer to protect herself. Even if something is in line with he values and sounds fun and exciting to her (feelings that we typically want to follow

and lean into), she'll say, "You know, that sounds great, but give me til tomorrow to confirm with you one way or the other."

Many of my mentors have told me that when someone makes a request of them, if the initial response isn't, "Hell yes!!" Then it's a "No, but thanks for thinking of me."

Reframe the way you look at saying no. Consider that every time you tell someone else no, you are telling yourself yes. Or, every time you tell someone else no, you are telling your partner, your children, your dreams, or whoever else is high on your value and priority list, YES.

I want you to energetically be a YES to your life and to your time, so remember, oftentimes this means saying NO.

Just Say No To Multi-Tasking

We should create a war on multi-tasking in mom circles, just as the government created a war on drugs in the 1980s.

When it comes to multi-tasking, just... say... no.

I know, I know... It feels like I'm taking away one of your super powers. But multi-tasking is NOT a superpower. In fact, it's super ineffective.

As moms we are expert multitaskers, because we are forced into doing it the minute that our baby is born. We nurse with one hand and answer emails with the other. We carry a baby around in one arm and make dinner with the other. We have a conversation with a friend while watching our toddler out of the corner of our eyes. We redirect our toddler's actions in the middle of telling our friend about our mammogram results.

With young children, multitasking is the way of life, but it's not meant to be that way forever. As quickly as we can, we must move on from that ineffective behavior and way of thinking into a more focused approach. Because here's the thing, study after study after study proves that multi-tasking is not effective.

Your brain can only perform one cognitive function at a time. The constant switching from one task to the other lowers your IQ by 10 points! Comparatively, actually toking ganja lowers your IQ by only 5 points. So, as the University of London shared in a CNN World Report, multitasking "makes you dumber than being stoned."

Instead of multitasking, let's look at a mindful way to approach time management that from Deepak Chopra who says, "We don't need better time management; we need a new state of mind." When speaking about time management he says to imagine that our life is grouped into 7 buckets:

1. Sleep

2. Meditation
3. Exercise
4. Work
5. Eating
6. Family Time
7. Creativity/Personal

The trick then is to do only one bucket at a time. No multitasking. No hopping between buckets. Instead, do only one. When its work time, work. When its exercise time, shut off your phone notifications and exercise. When its eating time, mindfully relish each bite. When it's family time, put away your laptop or yoga mat. You get the picture. Focus on one bucket and give it your all. You will accomplish way more and life will feel so much better if you give every part of your life 100% of your energy and focus, rather than scattering it around with 75% here, 15% there.

Do Only One.

An example of how this has made a difference for me is that I stopped checking my work email at stop lights. Work email is obviously in the work bucket. Most of the time in my car, however, is either the family bucket (driving to and from school, family outings, or running errands together) or the personal bucket (commuting anywhere by myself, the time when I usually listen to an audio book or online course, or jam out to gansta' rap or 80s rock to decompress.)

I found that when I combined buckets and checked my work email in my car at stoplights, I'd want to respond and address the email, but didn't have the time or space to do so, which would leave me feeling frustrated, stressed, and distracted. My mind would be on my clients or solving work challenges rather than giggling and present with my family.

My email app is now on my phone on the fourth screen all by itself, so I have to make an effort and swipe three times to get there. I considered deleting it altogether but haven't gotten to that level of super-power productivity yet! Why read an email if you can't properly respond to it? It pulls our energy, focus, and presence in too many distractions which makes us less efficient and exhausts our brain. This is why I don't check email or social media at night time during family and dinner time either.

When my oldest son was four, he even said to me, "Mom, if we can't have our iPads in the car, why do you get to have your phone in the car?" I started to argue that my phone is my work and my way to stay connected. But as kids, their iPads are their "work" and their way to stay connected. I can't set and hold a boundary for my children if I am not willing to also hold it for myself.

Establishing Non-Negotiables

What elements of the way you spend your time are non-negotiable?

All successful women who love their life must have a list of non-negotiable that they hold sacred to themselves. These non-negotiables might be either daily, monthly or yearly activities you do to stay sane and feel like your best self.

Think about it, we've created daily non-negotiables that culture tells us are good, what Michael Beckwith calls social contracts. These are things like showering and brushing your teeth every day. What are the non-negotiables for your spirit, your physical, emotional, and mental health?

My morning meditation practice is non-negotiable. I do it every single day. If I have to get up at 4am to catch a flight, I ensure I meditate on the airplane or in the taxi or once I arrive at my destination. Meditating daily is as essential for me as brushing my teeth.

I also schedule non-negotiable time throughout the week which is generally my workouts or intentional self-care as I talked about earlier. Sure, sometimes I have to move my workouts around as life happens, but they do not all come off my calendar. Many times my husband will want to run to the gym, or for all of us to go to a movie as a family, and because these things are non-negotiable for me, we schedule the aforementioned activities around my non-negotiables. It would be too easy to say, "Oh, it's just a workout." Or, "no big deal, I will figure out how to squeeze this in another day," but I know how important my non-negotiables are to my life and how much better I feel, so I protect this time.

Other non-negotiables my clients and I hold onto are:

- Tucking the kids in every night
- Morning coffee with the spouse
- Annual getaway with the spouse, family, and girls weekend
- Writing for 15 minutes every day
- Praying in the morning or at night
- 5 workouts per week
- Drinking a green juice or smoothie
- Weekly or monthly date night

Your Best Is Not Perfection

"The Four Agreements" by Don Miguel Ruiz is another book I love, though this book is more about how to live your life rather than productivity. It fits really well in this chapter about time management though because one of the four agreements is "Always do your best."

I like to tell my clients this while also adding in a final sentence to this agreement that packs the potent punch: Always do your best, but understand your best is not perfection.

As Ruiz explains, when you do your best in any and everything in life, you avoid self judgement and regret. Doing your best is also very much tied to the present moment, because your best

will change from moment to moment. Your best will look different when you've gotten 8 hours of sleep vs. 5, when your family is healthy or when someone is sick, when you are an expert at something or when you've just learned a new skill.

Always do your best for the moment that is right now in front of you, but do not strive for perfection. Perfection doesn't exist (except, perhaps, if you look at the perfect beauty of nature and the abundance of life our entire ecosystem provides). When you mistake your best for perfection you will spend unnecessary time and energy on things that don't matter. It will actually impact you being able to do your best in other areas of your life because the perfection will keep you bogged down on the thing in front of you you think is so important.

As I said, done is better than perfect.

Always do your best with the new time you've created for yourself.