

# Calming the Chaotic Life

**Time management strategies  
that work**



**brought to you  
by Iain Legg**

## Introduction

You may have heard it said that time is one of your most precious commodities. It is the one thing you get a limited amount of, and when that amount is exhausted, you can't get it back. You cannot go back to relive a moment in time, and you cannot jump forward in time.

All you have is right now, and if you are not using the time you have to live your best, most effective life, you probably feel stressed and unbalanced.

You have undoubtedly purchased this guide because you struggle to make the most of the time you have. Perhaps you consistently carry a heavy workload (professional, personal, or both) and want to find ways to become more efficient so you can get more done in less time. Maybe you feel stressed to the max each day and want to find ways to do less and enjoy more. Or maybe you simply yearn for a more peaceful existence instead of rushing madly from one activity to the next until you fall into bed exhausted every night.

Whatever your situation, this guide should serve as an insightful tool you can use on your journey to greater peace and productivity.

As you may have heard before, time cannot be “managed.” We each have the same amount of hours and minutes in a day and it is up to us what we do with them. Time management is really about managing **yourself** – but not in the way you probably think.

Time management is not about pushing yourself to do more, be more or have more. It's not about setting rigid schedules or getting up before the crack of dawn to squeeze in 3 more obligations; and it's not about giving up your social life so you can work more and make more money.

In this guide I'm going to show you a new way of living that might seem quite foreign to you. The techniques I share are probably going to seem ridiculously simple and you may be tempted to dismiss them. Or, you might feel resistant to trying them at all, believing they wouldn't work for your unique circumstances.

I strongly urge you to take them seriously and be willing to take a long, hard look at your own life. I'll be encouraging a lot of introspection as we go along, simply because your chaotic life is the result of unhealthy and unproductive habits.

Take a minute to absorb that. Your chaotic life is NOT the result of inadequacy or any shortcoming on your part. It is a series of habits that are not working for your benefit!

That is great news because once you can identify and understand these habits you can take steps to change them **permanently**.

All I ask is your willingness to keep an open mind and trust your instincts as we go along. If you can do that, you can overcome any habit that isn't serving your highest good.

As we move along from chapter to chapter, you'll notice that I ask you to do a lot of writing. You might be tempted to skip these exercises because they seem like too much work, but I strongly encourage you to do them anyway!

Get a little blank notebook and keep it by your side as you go through this guide. Each exercise should take just a few minutes, but they are quite eye-opening because your time management habits have got you running on autopilot most of the time. You don't realize you're doing certain things that could be making your life more chaotic, but by writing them down you'll suddenly become **aware** of them.

With awareness comes clarity, and with clarity comes empowerment to do something better. By taking the time to complete the exercises, you'll gain the power to change any habits that are causing problems in your life.

And the rest, as they say, will be history.

Are you ready to begin? Let's start by figuring out WHY you feel so overwhelmed.

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## Chapter One

### Why Are You Overwhelmed?

As you sit in the middle of a chaotic life, you may wonder how you got here. Where did you go wrong? When did everything get so out of control? How did you end up with so many responsibilities? Most importantly, how can you get back on track without having to ditch your entire routine and start over?

Chaos and imbalance tend to sneak in when you're not looking. You try to be a good person, do your best and help others as much as you can. You try to be supportive to your family members, friends, co-workers, boss, but somehow all of your good intentions get tangled up into a big, snarled mess.

You find yourself agreeing to things you really don't want to do, adding more and more items to your to-do list, and racing blindly from one task to the next in order to get everything done on a daily basis.

Despite your best efforts, you almost never accomplish everything you want to get done, so you start making sacrifices to try to squeeze out a little more time. Perhaps you shirk your self-care time or avoid social gatherings because you're just too stressed or drained to have a good time.

Maybe you can't even remember the last time you felt relaxed and happy!

**If you don't nip chaos in the bud before it blooms, it will quickly take over your life.**

If chaos has already bloomed into a huge, hideous flower in your life, it's time to take some drastic steps to get it back under control.

First, let's take a look at the most common causes of chaos:

#### **Too much to do**

If your schedule is crammed full of obligations that simply **MUST** be done on a daily basis, you will undoubtedly begin to feel that you just don't have enough time in the day. Between work and family obligations, community commitments, favors to others, errands, and numerous other tasks, you probably feel that squeezing in "one more thing" will make the whole thing explode from the pressure (and you along with it!).

#### **Conflicting priorities**

Sometimes it's not that you have too much to do – just too much at specific times. Perhaps you have overlapping deadlines in your work so you have to cram to get everything done on time, or you don't think ahead before agreeing to do something and then have to rush to keep your promises. Maybe your kids have conflicting activities so you constantly find yourself trying to be in two places at one time.

### **Lack of focus or proper planning**

Even if your priorities don't conflict with each other, you might find yourself creating unintentional conflicts. You might be disorganized or lack a clear schedule, so you end up taking on more than you can handle or forgetting about a responsibility until the last minute. As a result you end up walking around with scattered thoughts, feeling like you must be forgetting something.

### **Unclear boundaries**

If you have a hard time saying “no” to favors asked of you, or if you deal with constant interruptions and distractions at work and at home, your boundaries might be blurred. You may have given the impression that you are always available to help your friends, family members, co-workers, and neighbors with whatever they need. Have you ever heard yourself say, “Call me anytime . . . sure I'd love to help . . . I'm always here for you . . .” and so on? Most people are eager to take you up on such offers – even when it's inconvenient for you!

### **Lack of discipline**

Even when you know what has to be done each day, you may have trouble pushing yourself to get it all done. You might find yourself wasting time on unproductive activities or avoiding certain tasks because you don't enjoy them. As a result, you berate yourself for not being capable enough or focused enough to be as productive as you want to be. Unfortunately, such negative self-talk only makes the problem worse!

### **Procrastination**

Procrastination is different than lack of discipline because there are usually clear reasons why you procrastinate. For example, you might crave success but fear it at the same time. If you don't address your underlying fears, you'll keep putting off the activities that will make you successful – no matter how badly you might want to do them. Other examples might include: having a lack of belief in your ability to do something, so you avoid trying; confusion about the best way to proceed so you don't create a clear plan of action; believing that certain tasks or goals will be extremely difficult so you keep putting them off, and so on.

## **Which of these chaos causes speaks to you?**

You probably recognize a bit of yourself in each of the above habits, but which of them speaks most strongly to you? Which of them makes you feel like I must be spying on your life?

Here is a simple exercise that can help reveal the main reasons you feel out of control:

Grab your trusty notebook and a pen. Read the following question and write down the **FIRST THING** that comes to mind as your answer. Don't analyze it, just answer from the heart:

**My life would be much less stressful if:**

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What did you answer, and what does that say about your habits?

Examine your answer **very carefully** because it holds powerful clues to help you understand why you feel so stressed! Take a few minutes to jot down the insights you received from your answer, and what you think they mean.

Now, let's look at some example answers and review their possible meanings:

**“My life would be much less stressful if everyone would just leave me alone.”**

If your answer was similar to this, (even if worded differently) it is a clear indication that you feel overwhelmed with demands from other people. Whether those people are your family, boss, friends, community leaders, or anyone else – you are spending too much time focused on other people and not yourself. That means your boundaries are blurred – or non-existent.

**“My life would be much less stressful if I could clone myself.”**

Obviously, this answer reveals a heavy to-do list and not enough time to accomplish everything on it. If you've ever wished there was more than one of you to get everything done each day, you are probably taking on too much.

**“My life would be much less stressful if I had more time to care for myself.”**

This answer reveals a habit of taking care of everyone else except yourself. It means you are sacrificing your own self-care in order to meet the demands of others, which only makes you feel more stressed.

**“My life would be much less stressful if I had some help.”**

If this resembles your answer, you might be in the habit of doing everything yourself. You might avoid asking for help, believing that it will take you less time to do it yourself than try to get others to do it. Or – you might believe that no one else can do it as well as you can, so you end up doing it all.

**“My life would be much less stressful if I could just stick to my schedule each day.”**

This type of answer reveals a lack of focus, or the tendency to become easily scattered during stressful circumstances. It might reflect a lack of discipline, blurred boundaries that create unnecessary distractions, or even procrastination.

Does your answer fit any of these situations? If not, take a few minutes to jot down some ideas about what your answer **really** means. What are you really saying with the words you wrote?

It’s important to get a clear idea of the MAIN problem before you move on with this guide. As I mentioned, you probably see a little bit of yourself in each of the descriptions above. But one of those descriptions should seem to fit you almost exactly (even if the details are slightly unique to your own life).

## Chapter Two

### Simplifying Your Life

Knowing the reasons why your life is out of control is a great first step, especially if you are exploring these concepts for the first time. Perhaps you never before took the time to understand why you take on more than you should, or why you can't seem to stay focused.

More important than understanding the reasons why, however, is deciding to do something about them.

When you read the phrase, "simplifying your life," you probably cringe and worry that I'm going to tell you to donate all your material possessions and move to a cabin in the mountains. Not quite.

Simplifying your life is really about reducing or eliminating the things that are making your life more difficult. It certainly can include clearing the clutter from your home and reducing time-wasting activities, but it doesn't have to be painful.

In fact, once you begin a process like this, you'll quickly find yourself feeling inspired and empowered to tackle the bigger issues.

There are endless ways to simplify your life, but below are a few good ways to start.

#### **Identify Time Leaks**

Take a few minutes to think about the things you spend most of your time doing on a weekly basis and write them in your notebook. Include work, family activities, sleep, relaxation and recreation, errands and house/yard work, spiritual pursuits, creative activities and hobbies, socializing and so on. Next to each item, estimate the amount of time you spend on it weekly.

For example, if you routinely get 8 hours of sleep each night, that would add up to 56 hours in a week. When you've added up the hours you spend on all of your weekly activities, write the sum total at the bottom of your list.

How many hours did you end up with? There are 168 hours in a week (24 hours times 7 days). Do you seem to be missing a large chunk of time?

If you discovered that your weekly activities use up 135 hours, or 150 hours (or whatever your total is), you may wonder where the rest of that time is going!

Did you leave anything out? What about church, exercise, community activities, television, computer, reading, meditation, socializing, and so on? Be sure to add these to this list and estimate the amount of time you spend on them.

Don't worry about getting the times exactly right because it will likely vary week to week anyway. The idea is to get a rough estimate of where most of your time is going.

Now, go back over your list again. Does anything jump out at you? Does it shock you to realize you spend 20 or more hours watching television each week? Do you spend 6 hours browsing the internet after dinner?

It might not seem like you spend a lot of time doing these things WHILE you're doing them, but writing them down on a sheet of paper can be surprising for sure.

You'll be relieved to know that I'm not going to tell you to stop doing these things. I just want you to be aware that you DO have more time than you think you do.

Rather than completely cutting out the things you love, why not come up with a fair compromise? If you notice you're spending a lot of time in front of the television, maybe you can decide to watch only your most favorite shows and then spend the rest of your time doing something more productive. (I'll be sharing more ideas on productive activities in later chapters.)

One very common reason for time leaks is that we are trying to distract ourselves. We're trying to "zone out" because we feel stressed. We want an **escape** from the pressures in our daily lives. Television and computers are two popular pastimes that help us escape – but they don't help us **release** the stress. That means it's still with us when we come back to reality.

If this describes you too, I'll be sharing a few tips for releasing stress that you'll find helpful. One great side effect of stress relief is that it reduces your desire to "escape" – so you'll find yourself spending less time in front of the television and computer.

### **Identify Unnecessary Responsibilities**

Another way our lives become cluttered is by taking on more than we can comfortably handle. Take a few minutes to consider your obligations and responsibilities. Review your list of weekly activities and consider: Do you have an excessive amount of them? Do you find yourself agreeing to do things you don't really want to do? Do you have trouble saying no? Do friends and relatives expect you to do things to make their lives easier? Do they get upset if

you refuse their demands? Do they turn down YOUR requests for help if you ask?

Make a list of the things you do each day that you really don't HAVE to do – in other words, responsibilities that are not necessarily yours – or really shouldn't be yours.

How did you end up with them? Did you not know how to say no? Or were you afraid to say no so you didn't disappoint anyone?

In order to simplify your life, you may indeed have to release some of these responsibilities. Especially the ones that aren't really yours! I'll be sharing some good tips for better balancing your workload (both at home and at work) in a later chapter. For now, just get a clear idea of which responsibilities you want to release.

### **Identify Unproductive Habits**

If you fail to plan and prepare ahead of time, you will waste a lot of time scrambling around as you go about your daily activities. It will take longer to find the things you need, and you'll feel overwhelmed as you try to remember everything you're supposed to be doing.

Which of your habits seems to be unproductive? Failing to plan and prepare is a common one, but what about lack of discipline, procrastination, and disorganization? Do any of these describe you?

Jot down some ideas for things you do that are making your life more difficult, and come up with some ideas for how to turn them around. For example, if you lack discipline you might begin developing it by choosing ONE task that you must do first thing in the morning, and then doing it. Don't let yourself come up with excuses; just do it. As you get used to pushing yourself to do that one thing, you'll find it easier to do the same with all of your tasks.

No matter what unproductive habits you have, the process for changing them is the same: identify them and take steps to begin turning them around. Don't expect that you'll be able to change it immediately – just work toward the development of better habits over time.

### **Identify Emotional Drains**

Your emotions have the power to affect every area of your life. When you are weighed down by emotional burdens, you automatically struggle to maintain balance. Since your emotions often dictate your actions, feeling sad or overwhelmed can prevent you from taking full control of the things you do each day. As a result you end up feeling powerless.

Causes for emotional drains might include unhealthy relationships, unresolved issues, grudges, unexpressed anger, unprocessed grief, and many other things.

Here's how to tell if you have an emotional drain: you will often feel sad or moody or angry for no apparent reason. You'll feel like you're on an emotional roller coaster each day, experiencing feelings of confusion and unsteadiness.

Spending a lot of time in emotional turmoil will absolutely cause you to feel exhausted and powerless in all other areas of your life!

In order to close these emotional drains, you need to figure out if you have any. Take a few minutes to think about situations that may be tugging at your emotions. Are you involved in destructive relationships? Have you still not forgiven someone who has wronged you? Do you avoid working through painful emotions?

Once you have identified your biggest emotional burdens, make it your mission to resolve them.

This might involve working more consciously through feelings of grief and anger, ending unhealthy relationships, or letting go of old grudges that no longer serve you. If working through these things on your own seems too overwhelming, find a good therapist or counselor that can walk you through it. It may seem painful at the beginning, but this type of emotional work can be incredibly healing. When you heal your emotions, your entire life will change for the better.

### **Identify Financial Leaks**

Money is one of those things that can throw our entire lives into major upheaval. If you don't closely monitor and manage your financial situation, you'll end up with plenty of unnecessary expenses, an inadequate savings reserve, an overwhelming amount of bills – and plenty of stress to come along with them!

It's interesting to note that our relationship with money is often a reflection of our relationships with everything and every one else in our lives. Financial lack often mirrors lack in other areas, like health and relationships – and yes, balance!

Also interesting is the way our financial state can create problems elsewhere.

For example, an out of control budget might spur you into taking a second job because you believe you don't have enough money. Because you end up

working more than you really have to, you have less time for other things that matter, which creates more stress in your life.

You thought the problem stemmed from not having enough money, but the real issue was that you didn't effectively manage the money you already had.

If you haven't been consciously managing your financial state, it is likely out of balance. Think about financial leaks that cause problems in your life and write them down. Include things like old subscriptions you no longer use (but are still paying for), memberships that you don't really need (like the health club you no longer visit but haven't bothered to cancel the automatic payments), excessive spending, lack of a proper budget, lack of a savings or investment plan and so on.

Can you eliminate any of these financial drains? Set aside time each day to work on clearing up old financial obligations that are no longer needed. Balance your checkbook, correct errors on your credit reports, pay past due bills, start contributing to a savings program, and take care of anything else that needs your attention.

This is a process that won't be completed anytime soon – or ever! You will always have to manage your finances (unless you hire someone to do it for you), so get into the habit of reviewing and “tweaking” as you go. As you go along, you'll find that it doesn't take a lot of time if you do this regularly. It's only when you let it get out of control that it seems to take over your life.

### **Gaining Clarity About Your Leaks**

Take a few minutes now to glance back over the lists you made while reading this guide. As you do, you'll probably see plenty of areas where your time and energy are being drained.

The question is: What are you going to do about it?

Now that you are aware of these “leaks” in your life, you may feel that you simply cannot go back to living the way you were before. You might be ready to do some major “housecleaning” and get rid of the things that have been holding you back for so long.

Another possibility is that you might feel unnerved by what you have discovered, and wonder how on earth you'll ever turn it around. You might feel anxious about standing up for yourself or resolving old emotional issues that have been wearing on you.

Or you might feel strongly that you don't have any leaks in your life. You might glance over your notes and say that every single thing you do each day is absolutely necessary. You can't get rid of anything, so your situation is hopeless.

Not necessarily!

What appears to be solid and unchangeable may just be a **perception**.

For example, you might think you can't release certain situations simply because they would create unpleasant consequences that you don't want to deal with.

I won't tell you that gaining control of your life will always be easy. You'll likely have to make some tough decisions about what is best for you, and other people might disagree – especially if your decisions affect them.

In the following chapters I'll be sharing tips and ideas to help you make positive changes where they count – but ultimately it is up to you what you do, or don't do.

If your life is truly overwhelming and unbearable the way it is, **SOME** changes will need to be made. You may discover that a few small changes create adequate results. Or you may find that you need to do a complete overhaul in order to feel more peaceful.

Let your instincts lead you! Start with a few small changes and see what happens. If you feel empowered, try some bigger changes. It's okay to move through this process at a comfortable pace.

### **Achieving Better Balance**

As you may have noticed throughout this chapter, simplifying your life is really about **better balancing** the things you do on a regular basis. It's not about eliminating things you love or forcing yourself to do things you don't enjoy. It's about taking baby steps as you gain control over your life circumstances again.

As you go through these changes you will undoubtedly need to make some sacrifices, even if they are small ones. You may need to cut down on certain things in order to make room for others. You may need to face some scary feelings or learn to build up your courage to take better control of your time.

However, remember that what you are **REALLY** giving up is an unbalanced, chaotic life. It may seem like you are making sacrifices, but try to affirm what you stand to **GAIN** in the process.

More happiness, peace of mind, contentment, fulfillment – and many more benefits come from living your life more consciously.

You may be surprised to realize that the more time and energy you direct toward creating a more balanced life, the more time you seem to have!

That's because being disorganized, stressed and scattered drains an incredible amount of your energy and focus. You spend most of your time running around like a crazy person, which seems to make time go faster, which makes it seem like you have less time available.

When you make time for what matters, everything else seems to flow effortlessly into place. The hardest part is deciding what really matters to you, which we'll cover in the next chapter.

## Chapter Three

### Making Time for What Matters

When you don't set priorities in your life, you end up spending a lot of time on things that don't really matter and neglecting the things that do.

This chapter is all about identifying the things that matter to YOU, and making sure you have time for them. This will include important things like work and family, but also time for personal growth, socializing and hobbies.

**Question:** If you could create any kind of daily schedule for your life, what would it look like? Think about how much time each day you'd like to spend working, relaxing, playing, and interacting with others.

You might be tempted to get cute with this and say "I'd like to work only 2 hours a day and play the rest of the time," but let's try to make it somewhat more realistic. That's not to say that working only 2 hours a day is an impossible goal, but it's probably not very realistic for where you are in your life right NOW. So try to keep your answers more in line with who you are and what you do in your life today.

Most likely you'd designate 6 to 8 hours a day for work, depending on what you do and whether you work full-time or part-time, whether you are a business owner or employee, and so on. Maybe another 7 to 8 hours for sleep each night, and an hour to yourself to read and relax, and maybe an hour for exercise and meditation, etc.

Keep going until you've included time for everything that really matters, including time for your family and friends, volunteer activities, creative pursuits, errands and house/yard work, and even television and computer time.

Add up the time you'd spend on all these activities daily, and subtract the sum from 24. Do you have any time left over?

Usually one of two things will happen:

Either you'll seem to have too much time left over and wonder what you left out.

Or, you'll find that you don't have enough time because you're trying to squeeze in too many activities, or allow too much time for certain activities.

Keep tweaking your imaginary schedule until you come up with something workable.

Now, compare this schedule to your REAL schedule. Where are the discrepancies?

## **Common Conflicts**

Trying to create a workable schedule can be challenging for sure! No matter how much you might want to squeeze into a day, compromises may be necessary.

Let's look at some common schedule conflicts:

**Work:** Even though you might like to work only 6 or 8 hours a day, the company you work for might have a mandatory overtime policy, or you might have a long commute that eats into the time you would spend on other activities.

Of course, you can decide to get a new job that doesn't require so many hours or offers a shorter commute, but there may be consequences such as less pay, reduced benefits or decreased opportunity for advancement.

Another option is to adjust the time you spend on other activities to make up for the extra time spent working or commuting. You might decide to hire a cleaning or errand service so you can take those tasks off your to-do list, or you might reduce the amount of time you spend volunteering.

**Family:** Quality time with your family is important, but it's very easy to shirk when you've got a lot going on in other areas of your life. Instead of promising that you'll spend more time with your family on the weekends when you're not so busy, how about trying smaller segments of quality time more often?

It's not how much time you spend with your family that creates a solid bond, but what you DO with the time you spend together. If you're all flopping in front of the television, you're not really connecting as deeply as you could.

Consider alternative activities like these: eating dinner together as you talk about your day; reading your kids a bedtime story; playing catch for an hour in the backyard, or having your kids help with the yard work; setting aside 20 minutes to cuddle with your spouse before bed; and there are many more!

Quality time with those you love doesn't have to take a lot of time, just provide an opportunity to connect on a regular basis.

**Personal time:** Unfortunately, this is one thing that usually gets shoved aside when you're busy. You start believing that everyone and everything else is more important than your own self-care, so you keep putting off the things you know would make you a happier and more balanced person.

If you take away nothing else from this guide, remember this: Time to yourself is absolutely VITAL to your health and well-being. It's so important, in fact, that it will often determine your quality of life in ALL other areas!

When you ignore your own self-care and focus all of your attention on others and their needs, your energy and focus will suffer greatly.

You might not notice it right away, but you'll eventually find yourself feeling drained, disconnected, scattered and frustrated. If this goes on long enough, the feelings will intensify and begin to affect everything from your job performance to your relationships to your financial circumstances.

If you really want to create a balanced, serene life, you will need to make time for yourself each day. It doesn't have to be massive amounts of time, but enough so that you can relax, recharge and focus on things that make you feel good.

What should you do with this time? Try activities like journaling, meditation, prayer, creative pursuits, or just sit quietly and listen to music you enjoy! What you do doesn't really matter – just that it makes you feel happy and relaxed.

What other conflicts came up when you were creating your schedule?

Take a few minutes now to see if you can find a way to balance the time you spend on various activities and make them fit better into your schedule.

In the next chapter, we'll cover another common problem: How to stick to your schedule.

## Chapter Four

### Sticking To Your Schedule

In chapter three you created a make-believe schedule and then compared it to your real schedule. You did some tweaking so you could align these two schedules more realistically, and you probably made some hard decisions about how to make it all fit together so it works better for you.

Are you feeling more optimistic that a balanced life is possible for you? If not, take heart. What we're going to cover in this chapter will help you see that a schedule really needs FLEXIBILITY more than anything else.

As much as we'd like to believe that we can set a rigid schedule and stick to it like glue, the reality of our lives is much different. Things will go wrong. We will experience unexpected delays that throw off our entire routine. Events will not always comply with our wishes. That's just the way it is.

Keeping a balanced schedule is **not a rigid process**.

Think about activities that require physical balance, like riding a bicycle or walking on a balance beam. In order to stay upright, you need to sway gently back and forth, right? If you start to tip too far over to one side, you need to quickly correct your angle by leaning slightly back to the other side.

Your daily schedule is no different! You will need to constantly balance and rebalance yourself as you go through each day. You will need to juggle and rearrange and reprioritize moment to moment. Accept this, EXPECT it and prepare for it. To do otherwise will only result in more stress.

Sticking to your schedule will require constant readjustment. If one task takes longer than you planned for, you will have to reduce the time you spend on something else or make up the time in other ways.

One good way to minimize time conflicts is by being sure to allow adequate time for anything you plan to do. You might hope that a trip to the grocery store will only take an hour, but is that what normally happens? You might insist that your commute should take no more than 40 minutes, but what if you encounter road construction or a traffic jam?

Get into the habit of planning ahead for the unexpected and allowing a little extra time for everything. If you think something will take 30 minutes, allow 45 minutes, or even an hour. If you do this with all of your activities, you'll find yourself very often being ahead of schedule. What a nice change!

## **Making Moment to Moment Decisions**

Even when you plan ahead, you will likely still have to make moment to moment decisions to keep your priorities in order.

At the beginning of your day, you might have a clear view of the things you want to accomplish that day. You may have allowed extra time and prepared for the unexpected, but unless you consciously CHOOSE to stick to your schedule in every moment, you will find it frighteningly easy to get sidetracked.

Let's use an example:

Your day is going along great. You're ahead of schedule and you just got home from work and are getting ready to prepare dinner. You glance at the clock and see that you've still got another 15 minutes before you would normally begin preparing dinner, and suddenly you feel tempted to get online and check your email – even though you originally set aside an hour for computer time after dinner.

Right there, at that moment, you will have to make a decision. Can you trust yourself to stay on the computer for just a few minutes? Or will you lose track of time and throw your schedule off?

What you choose to do in that moment will determine whether the rest of your day continues in a calm and efficient manner, or becomes chaotic and scattered.

You can probably imagine endless moments like this throughout the course of every day where you will be tempted to veer off schedule. Whether you choose to do it or not is up to you.

By the way, there is nothing really wrong with not sticking to your intended schedule sometimes. You might have valid reasons for doing so, and you'll have no trouble adjusting everything else to work out fine.

But if you find yourself doing this a lot and creating imbalance in other areas, it's a good idea to reevaluate your priorities and adjust your schedule accordingly. You may be trying to sabotage yourself for some reason, and a little introspection will usually reveal why. Once you understand why you're doing something, you can address it and make changes to remove the temptation.

As you'll eventually come to realize, sticking to a schedule is really all about taking the time to do the things you know need to be done, while still being flexible enough to handle the things you didn't plan on.

The more you practice juggling the events and activities of your life, the more efficient you will become at handling them smoothly and effortlessly.

Of course, your daily activities also include involvement from other people – and that can create another snag if you don't have firm boundaries in place. We'll discuss that in more detail in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five

### Setting Boundaries

If you haven't made a conscious decision to set boundaries in your life, you probably feel overwhelmed by all of the demands on your time. You might have a difficult time saying no to requests from other people, or you might volunteer to take on projects you'd rather not do simply because you feel obligated to help.

Helping others is a wonderful thing – until it begins to take over your life.

Taking full control of your schedule will require you to set firm boundaries in your life. This might involve having the confidence to say no when you need to, or summoning the courage to eliminate activities that are beginning to drain too much of your time and energy.

Setting boundaries can be an uncomfortable process if you've never done it before, but it does get easier as you go along.

Probably the most common problem that arises is your own anxiety about what others will think of you when you say no. You might worry that they'll get angry or stop speaking to you. You might feel guilty because you are adding to their burden as you lighten your own, and this can be difficult when the other person is someone you truly care about.

What it comes down to, however, is doing what you know is right for you, even if it creates a bit of unpleasantness at first.

Take a few minutes right now to glance back over the lists you made in earlier chapters. Do you see a lot of responsibilities that really aren't yours? Do you constantly take on last minute errands or favors for friends and family? Do you spend a lot of time babysitting your neighbor's children without pay? Are you the one who always ends up coordinating work activities because no one else volunteers? Are you the parent who always ends up taking responsibility for school projects because other parents are "too busy?"

Wherever you see imbalance relating to demands from others on your lists, make a little star next to it or underline it.

When you've finished, consider each of those items carefully. Which of them would you really like to let go of? Which of them is causing the greatest drain on your time and energy?

Now for the big question: are you willing to let go of them?

Ask yourself what consequences might arise from choosing to let go of these obligations. The answers might not be pleasant, but would they be worth the peace of mind you gain in return?

Your answer to this question will vary depending on the situation. Some things you might choose to keep simply because you don't feel ready to face the consequences. That's okay! If you are willing to accept the consequences for hanging onto it for now, go ahead and do so.

But for the others, the ones you're truly ready to let go of, build up your courage and get ready to make some waves.

### **Giving Back What Isn't Yours**

When you first begin to set boundaries in your life, you will very likely experience some resistance from others. Especially if you are the type of person that would do anything for anyone regardless of the turmoil it causes in your own life, those people have come to depend on your help.

When you try to give their own responsibilities back to them, they probably won't be thrilled about it.

They'll probably react in one of two ways:

1) Anger and offense. They might express hurt that you won't help them any longer, or try to play on your sympathies by telling you just how stressed out THEY are, and how you are now adding to that stress. They might express anger at you for "not caring" about them, or acting like you NEVER do anything to help them. They might even stop speaking to you for awhile.

2) Or, they might surprise you by not caring much one way or the other. This can be the most surprising of all reactions, but is more common than you might think! I remember the first time I said no to a request someone made of me. I was apologetic that I couldn't help them but I stood firm with my decision. The person simply shrugged and said okay, then changed the subject. Hello! Who knew it could be that easy?

Of course, it might not **always** be that easy. But it can happen.

Most important in this process is your own commitment to your decision. If you feel uncertain about saying no, they'll probably keep trying to change your mind. If you stand firm in your conviction, they'll know you're serious.

Before you try setting boundaries, you might find it helpful to first get yourself into the right mind-set by reminding yourself that it is not your job to save

anyone else. There's nothing wrong with doing what you can to help others, but when it begins to become burdensome and your own life is suffering because of it, you have to make a choice to let it go.

You may also want to explore the reasons why you feel it necessary to take on the burdens of others. Part of the reason might be because you care about them and want to make their lives easier. Or you might be afraid that they won't like you if you don't help them. Are you a "people pleaser" by nature? Do you think that you have to ingratiate yourself to others in order to be liked and accepted?

If so, you will continue to let other people influence your time management process.

Take time to explore the beliefs and feelings that drive your behavior, you'll be better able to create healthier habits that can keep everyone happy – including yourself!

Finally, remember that this doesn't have to be an either-or situation all the time. Setting boundaries doesn't mean you can't EVER offer to help someone! Instead of blindly agreeing to everything, try a compromise that works for everyone involved. Offer to help with part of a project, rather than taking on the whole thing yourself. Offer to watch your neighbor's kids for a few hours on Saturday while she watches yours on Sunday. Figure out how many hours per week you want to devote to helping others, and then stick to it.

Don't apologize, and don't feel guilty. You have the right to choose how you spend your time.

Despite a few people acting like they are losing their right arm, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised by how understanding and supportive most people can be.

### **Keep the No's Coming**

Once you've cleared your schedule of unnecessary obligations, then you need to practice saying "no" on a regular basis so you don't end up right back where you were! Remember, you're probably in the habit of agreeing to do things for other people. It might take some conscious effort to pause and consider each request carefully.

Turning down a request can be as simple as saying, "I'm sorry but I just can't do it right now. I'd like to help you out, but I'll have to pass this time." You don't have to explain why or promise to do something else in the future. Simply let them know that you can't do it, period.

Some people will accept that answer and move on. Others might argue if they really want you to do it, or if they are used to you always saying yes. They might question you in an aggressive manner, or demand to know what makes you so busy you can't help them. You are not obligated to explain or defend your decision!

When you finally really "get it" that YOU are in charge of your time, and you really DON'T have to meet the demands of others, you'll experience such an incredible sense of freedom and empowerment.

### **It's All About Honoring Yourself**

Setting boundaries in your life is all about honoring yourself. Having no boundaries means letting other people infringe on your time and energy. Setting boundaries and being firm about them means treating yourself with the respect you deserve.

## Chapter Six

### Sharing the Load

Time for a self-check: Are you the one in your family that does EVERYTHING? Do other family members rely on you to cook their meals, keep the fridge stocked with their favorite foods, wash their clothes, pick up after them, and generally make their lives easier?

What about at work? Are you the person everyone runs to when they have a problem? Are you the one always picking up the slack when there is extra work to be done?

If so, you've got a big problem on your hands – you've trained everyone to depend on YOU!

That's a big mistake (but a very common one).

As we covered in the last chapter, setting boundaries is crucial if you want to take better control of your time. In order to do that, you will probably need to do some reassigning of responsibilities.

The most difficult part of this process is going to be convincing others that changes need to be made. Why would they agree when they've got it so easy? They're going to resist if it means more work for them. They might complain, refuse to do their share, or make the transition as difficult as possible.

However, once they see you're serious, they should come around and adjust to the new routine. Just be prepared to do a lot of reminding, and a lot of standing your ground.

Here are some ideas for distributing the workload more evenly:

First, I've found that being honest about feeling overwhelmed is one of the best ways to get the process started. Most often people aren't intentionally making your life more difficult, they are just letting you do what you choose to do. If you offer to do all the work, why should they turn you down? And how would they know it's stressful for you unless you say so?

Tell your family members, co-workers and friends that you are struggling to keep up with everything and you'd like to figure out a way to work together. Don't nag or complain or try to make them feel sorry for you; just be genuine and most people will do what they can to help.

Then come up with a plan to better share the load. You can split household chores between family members, speak to your boss about hiring an office assistant to help with overflow in the workplace, or even hire part time help yourself.

It used to be only the wealthy that could afford to hire help, but not so anymore! There are plentiful errand services, cleaning services, personal shoppers, dog walkers, pet-sitters, and just about any other type of service you can imagine popping up all over the place. There are even companies that will pick up your dog's waste from your backyard!

Your first argument may be that you can't afford to hire one of these services, but I think you'd be pleasantly surprised when you start checking rates.

Maybe you can't afford a live-in cleaning service, but how about once a week to vacuum and do the heavy cleaning? How much time would that free up each week?

How about using a grocery delivery service instead of going to the supermarket yourself? Many grocers now have an online ordering service. You go to the website, fill up your virtual shopping cart with the items you want, pay by credit or debit card and they deliver them right to your front door! It's probably less expensive than you think; most delivery fees are a small percentage of the cost of your shopping order.

You can also check with your local dry cleaner to find out if they offer a pick up and delivery service, or hire a personal shopper to find the right gift for that special someone.

You might resist the thought of spending money on these types of services, but the small cost can pay big returns in the form of less stress and a happier you!

If you prefer to split the workload more evenly between family members or co-workers instead of hiring professional helpers, be prepared to do a lot of reminding at the beginning. Remember, they are used to sitting back and letting you take care of everything and they might not adjust to the new program easily.

Here are a few tips to help make the transition easier:

- Don't nag or complain or get angry when they don't do their share. That will only make them resist. Instead, ask nicely – repeatedly and firmly.

- Remind them that they agreed to help out more. If you keep reminding them, eventually they will start to do it just because they don't want to hear you asking yet again! Little by little the new habits will take hold.
- Don't give up! I hear people say all the time, "It's less work for me to do it myself than to keep asking over and over again." That may be true at the beginning, but over the long run it's worth the investment of time and energy to keep reminding them.

## Chapter Seven

### Get Organized and Save Time

I'm about to share one simple tip that can save you a lot of time in the long run! As described earlier in this guide, disorganization can create a chain reaction of time and energy leaks. The less organized you are, the longer it will take to accomplish even the simplest task.

Here's a simple way to cut the time you spend on just about anything:

- Spend 15 minutes planning and preparing ahead of time.

Start with the activities that seem to take the longest amount of time each day. If your morning routine is a nightmare scramble to get out of the house on time, spend 15 minutes in the evening getting things ready for the next day.

Choose outfits, prepare lunches, gather supplies, keys, cell phone, and anything else you'll need to take with you. Get a coffee pot with a timer and set it so coffee is ready when you wake up.

This simple habit can save you hours of time in the long run, and can be applied to nearly any activity or task.

Work, for example. Let's say you're starting a big project with many different parts. You can keep a running checklist in your head, but if you take 15 minutes to put it on paper, you'll have an easier time remembering everything. Don't just write down your plans, but also take time to gather up all the supplies you'll need, make a list of people to call, keep a running to-do list for tasks, and a list of completed items.

Each day before you begin working on the project, review what you've done so far. Read your notes and add anything else that comes to mind. After the 15 minutes are up, your mind will be focused and ready to get to work.

#### **Creating an Organized Foundation**

When you think of organization, you probably envision a spotless and tidy environment, everything nestled into its own proper place. That would be ideal but it's not very realistic, is it?

Most of us have unrealistic ideas of what it means to be organized. Let's look at it from another angle.

The stuff you use on a daily basis is always getting taken out and used. Books and paperwork get shuffled around, CDs and DVDs get played, clothing and dishes get dirtied, and so on. Trying to keep your home and workplace completely neat and spotless will drive you crazy because nothing in your environment will stay static.

When you think about it, **the core of organization is all about knowing where everything is and keeping it accessible for when you need it.**

That sounds a little easier, doesn't it? The specifics of that definition will vary for each individual. Instead of trying to meet some ridiculous expectation of hyper-neatness in your surroundings, I want to encourage you to come up with a system that works for YOU.

Go through your home and work space and consider the items that you use on a regular basis. Ask yourself how you can keep them accessible, yet organized.

Perhaps you can place seldom-used items in a closet and keep items you use frequently on a shelving system in the open. Invest in some of those neat transparent storage bins so you can easily see what is stored where, or buy a label-maker and stick little notes on every drawer and cabinet.

However you choose to do it, focus on one thing: **What will save you the most time and energy?**

If you are forever losing your car keys, designate a spot for them. If your closet is about to explode, remove clothing, shoes and purses you no longer need. If you trigger an avalanche of plastic storage containers every time you open your kitchen cabinet, box up a bunch of them to donate.

Speaking of which:

Organization is also about simplifying your surroundings by purging the unnecessary. This alone can save you an unbelievable amount of time. If your home and work place are cluttered with things you don't use anymore, clear them out.

Set aside a few minutes a day to gather up some items to donate, or throw away if they aren't usable anymore. Go through your kitchen cabinets, closets, book collection, CD and DVD collection, and clear out what is no longer needed.

You'll feel lighter AND have an easier time organizing the items you want to keep.

Believe it or not, organization is very much a HABIT, just like disorganization. It's not that you can't control the clutter; you just haven't made it a habit to do so. If you work at it a little bit each day you'll soon find yourself doing it automatically.

## Chapter Eight

### Zap Stress Before It Zaps You

Stress is an unavoidable side effect of a chaotic life. The more out of balance your life gets, the more stress you will have.

The other chapters of this guide have shown you that taking control can be a simple (though not always easy) process. This chapter is all about managing stress – whether you are making a clean start with your new balanced life, or still trying to get a handle on your chaotic lifestyle.

Stress-relief is all about **choosing** a calmer mind-set. At any moment you can choose to be stressed and frustrated, or you can choose to be calm and happy. While your surroundings can and do affect your state of mind, how you feel and what you think are within your control.

If you choose not to let the little things bother you, they won't. If you choose to believe you are capable of handling challenges, you will be.

While the overall process begins and ends between your own ears, there are also a few simple things you can do on a daily basis that will help greatly.

#### **Meditation**

Meditation is by far one of the most effective ways to reduce stress. Partly because it makes you feel so calm, but also because it really seems to make time slow down!

Try meditating for 10 minutes each morning before you start your day, and perhaps 10 minutes before you go to sleep at night. When you meditate, don't worry about "doing" anything like sitting a certain way or chanting a strange mantra. Just sit or lie comfortably, close your eyes, breath slowly and deeply, and quiet your thoughts. Focus on the silence within you, and stay focused on it for as long as you can.

At first you'll notice your mind wandering and you'll have to keep returning your attention to the silence, but over time you will train your mind to relax when you meditate and it will become much easier.

Remember, one cause of stress is constant mental chatter that keeps your mind running in circles every minute of the day. By setting aside a few minutes a day to detach from it and just "be," you are providing a beneficial space in which stress does not exist.

If you give this a fair shot every day, you'll soon grow to LOVE it! You'll notice that time really does seem to slow down, and everything else in your life seems calmer and more peaceful. You won't feel so attached to little annoyances, and you'll be better able to handle the big problems when they come along. Overall, you'll just feel much more centered and balanced – which will have a positive effect on everything you do.

## **Exercise**

With all the “running around” you do in your daily routine, you probably feel like you get plenty of exercise. ;-) But it's not the same thing as using exercise for stress relief.

Most important is doing an exercise that you'll enjoy. Many people prefer walking, but maybe you would like riding a bicycle or rollerblading or hiking. Whatever you choose, make it a **conscious** stress reliever!

Here's what I mean by that: when you decide to exercise each day, affirm that you are doing so to burn off excess tension from your body. As you work out, allow yourself to enjoy the feeling of lightness that flows over you and really get into the feeling of empowerment you experience as you work your muscles. When those great endorphins start to flow, affirm that they are washing away any stress you hold in your body.

Making this a more conscious process will give you a greater sense of control over your stress. Rather than feeling like a victim of outside influences, you are choosing to let go of stress and take control of your mind-set again.

## **Proper Rest**

Another powerful way to reduce your stress level is by getting enough sleep each night! When you don't get enough sleep, your body does not have the stamina and focus it needs to meet your daily demands.

The first step is to figure out how much sleep YOU need every night. This will vary widely for everyone, but most people will be between 6 and 9 hours. Try experimenting with the amount of time you sleep each night, and pay attention to how you feel the next day.

How does your energy level and mental focus compare when you get 6 hours or 8 hours of sleep? It will probably take you a week or two to figure out the optimal time for you.

Once you know – stick to it like glue. Be sure to go to bed earlier than you have to in order to get your allotted time for sleep. For example: if you require 8 hours of sleep and you have to get up at 6:00am, you need to be **sleeping** by

10:00pm. If you climb into bed at 10:00pm, you probably won't fall asleep right away and end up getting less sleep than you need. Try going to bed 30 or 60 minutes earlier so you can let your mind wind down, perhaps do some light reading or meditating, etc.

Committing to getting adequate rest each night is one thing you can do to drastically cut your stress level. You'll be better able to function when you're alert and well-rested.

## **Proper Nutrition**

Just as inadequate rest can drain your energy and focus, so can poor nutrition. Do you live on caffeine and sugar? Stimulants may seem to help in the short run, but eventually they will become less effective and you'll experience negative side-effects, like the inevitable "crash" when you come down from them.

Instead of relying on stimulants to keep you going, why not invest some time into preparing foods that provide lasting energy? The exact foods will vary for different people, but generally whole foods like fruit and vegetables are good, as well as lean protein, complex carbohydrates and plenty of fresh water.

Try experimenting with how you feel when you eat certain foods, and keep a journal of the results. Do you notice you feel sluggish when you eat dairy products or sugar? Do the "white carbs" (pasta, potatoes, white bread, sugar) seem to numb your ability to focus?

Do you get a burst of energy from a roasted chicken salad and fruit for lunch? Does a glass of cold water perk up your brain better than coffee in the morning?

Whatever foods and beverages help you feel less stressed and more balanced, start keeping a list of them and work them into your diet.

It's easy to forget how wise our bodies really are! If we listen to them, they will tell us exactly what they need to perform at an optimal level.

## **Express Yourself**

There are two types of self-expression that can help you feel less stressed:

- 1) Journaling your thoughts and feelings. Unprocessed emotions can make you feel burdened and overwhelmed. If you get into the habit of writing out your thoughts and feelings each day, you are in effect "purging" them from your mind and body. The result: YOU feel lighter and unburdened. Use your personal journal to spill everything you don't want to say to someone else.

Express your anger, frustration, pain, sadness, loneliness, and so on – and it won't continue to drag you down.

Note: This is also a great way to tune into your self-talk! If you find you're having trouble juggling everything or feeling excessively stressed, ask yourself why. Write questions that trigger a subconscious answer like this: "I feel really stressed and out of control because . . ." and answer from the heart. Doing this on a regular basis can help you nip problems in the bud before they become chronic and give you the awareness to avoid slipping back into old destructive habits.

2) Creative expression. Make time to express your creative side with artistic pursuits. This is a great way to prevent stress from taking over your life, for two reasons. First because you'll feel happier when you do things you love on a regular basis, and second because you are giving yourself **permission** to relax and have fun. You won't end up feeling pressured because you do nothing but work and take care of others; you'll be allowing time for yourself, which cannot help but lift your mood.

## Conclusion: A Little Goes a Long Way

We've covered a lot of material in this guide, and you may be feeling overwhelmed about making lasting changes in your life. Don't feel that you have to do everything at once!

Rather than trying to change everything immediately, commit to making one small change each day. Eliminate one drain on your time and energy. Shed one unnecessary obligation. Purge your home of one unneeded item.

The more you do this, the more the positive benefits will build up. You may not notice a big change right away, but soon you'll start to feel happier and more balanced. You'll no longer feel like you're running an endless race, but instead pause to admire the scenery now and then.

Remember, at the beginning of this guide I said that time management is all about learning to approach your life in a different way, moment to moment. It's not about forcing yourself to stick to a rigid schedule or push yourself beyond your limitations.

In fact, if I had to sum up the most important point of this guide in a few words, I'd say that **time management is all about learning to be kind to yourself.**

A chaotic life is akin to punishment, isn't it? It's your way of saying to yourself, "You're not good enough; you don't do enough; you must push yourself harder and try to make everyone else happy – even if it's at the expense of your own peace of mind."

I know you don't want that anymore. You and I both know that you deserve a harmonious life, filled with a lot of laughter, love, peace and productivity. Allow yourself to create exactly that, one moment at a time.

Iain Legg

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