

The Faster I Go, The Behinder I Get

Becky@BeckyClarkBooks.com

To Do Lists and Schedules

- To figure out how long something takes, time yourself 3x doing it as you normally do to get an average, including any interruptions.
- Decide tonight what your most pressing task is tomorrow and do it first.
- A TO DO without a WHEN doesn't get done.
- Consider — *deleting* (what's the worst that can happen if you don't do it?); *delaying* (rescheduling for a better time); *delegating* (is there someone who can do it better, faster, cheaper, or good enough?); *diminishing* (shortcuts or shaving down)
- One system in one place

Dots and Dashes

- Learn to concentrate for an hour
- A timer is your best friend
- Think of tasks as either quick dots or longer dashes
- Focus on completion

Email

- Never check your email first thing in the morning
- Respond immediately to emails that will take you less than 2 minutes. If it requires longer, then schedule specific time later in day.
- Declare Email Bankruptcy and delete it all
- Most email isn't critical. Don't give people power over your schedule.

Phones

- Only check your phone messages at designated times and make sure your kids/spouse/parents know when that is
- Silence it
- If you can't help checking it obsessively, put it downstairs, upstairs, glove compartment of your car, litter box. Hands off!

Social Media — Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc

- Set timer for the allotted time you have set aside
- Heed said timer

Procrastination

- Bribe yourself
- You only have to focus on the task for 5 minutes. Then 5 more. It's the same way we get on the treadmill.
- Keep a log for a week. Did you avoid all tasks or just some? See if you can find a pattern.
- Find something fun about the task
- Break job down into smaller bites
- When writing, make it easy to pick up where you left off — stop writing midsentence when you stop for the day/lunch
- Start anywhere. Lots of writers start with a scene or with the ending. Just start.
- If you don't want to paint the bookcase, don't do it. Either live with the old paint or get someone else to do it.
- What's the worst that can happen? If you fail, you never have to do it again, or you learn something that helps you succeed.
- Reframe your thinking about the task - yes, it's difficult to write a novel, but not TOO difficult - people do it every day
- We're grown ups - we do things we don't want to

Clutter

- Declutter everything — all the rooms of your house, all your drawers, car, desk, computer desktop, shelves, cabinets, closets
- A place for everything and everything in its place. Never waste time searching for stuff again.
- Declutter your brain too
- Don't save stuff because you think it might be worth something someday. Visit eBay and find out.
- Go for a Trial Separation from your stuff. Box it up, tape it closed, write the date. If it's still taped shut in 6 months, don't even open it. Just donate or toss it.
- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and ... Refuse. As in refuse to buy any more stuff.

Prioritize

- Determine your top priority for the day - the one thing you'd sacrifice everything else to achieve and focus on it.
- If your To Do list won't lead you there, cross items off or re-schedule them
- Tackle your hardest job first and save your favorite tasks till the end so you look forward to them. Helps with procrastination too.
- Prioritize like they do in business — which task makes you money?
- If they seem equal, ask: How long will it take? What's the return on my time investment? When's the deadline?

Perfectionists

- Learn selective perspective. Which things really need to be perfect (query, synopsis, ms) and which can be good enough (housecleaning, store-bought cupcakes for bake sale)?
- Figure out who belongs to that voice in your head telling you stuff isn't good enough
- Back away if you've worked on it too long. There's a law of diminishing returns.
- Impose deadlines on yourself. Something done imperfectly on time is usually better than something late.
- Allow yourself the opportunity to do it poorly. Just do it.
- Recognize degrees of excellence. On a scale of 1-10, a 7 doesn't look much different from a 10 to most people.

Multi-Tasking

- Multi-tasking is a myth; nobody can do it.
- Don't confuse multi-tasking with doing a lot of stuff. Multi-tasking is trying to do all those things at the same time.
- Your brain can't focus on two separate things unless one of them is completely mindless. And driving isn't mindless. Neither is talking on your phone. Hang up and drive!
- People multi-task because they're worried. Seems better to work on everything so 100% of your tasks are 50% done. But you'd feel much more in control if 50% of your tasks were 100% done and you know you have a plan to finish the other 50%.
- Don't confuse activity with accomplishment
- Focus on one job till it's done or your time is up. Then focus on another one.

Paperwork

- Identify your problem areas - Desktop? Filing system? Emails? Reading material? Piles of stuff?
- Then prioritize - which is the biggest problem? Which is costing you the most money? The most time?
- Every day put things away, write that debit transaction in your check register, add that contact to your database, file that receipt.
- Don't let your filing pile up. It makes it that much harder to find stuff.
- When you file monthly bills, shred the previous month at the same time. Weed your files as you go.
- If you don't have a file cabinet, go get one.
- Put all your papers in one pile then sort into categories. Which category is most important? Put it on your To Do list then tackle next most important pile.

Delegation

- Insourcing and Outsourcing
- Make a list of stuff you hate to do. Can anyone do any of those things better? What is your time worth?
- Enlist your kids and spouse
- Remember to monitor and mentor; don't nag and micromanage. Set expectations/parameters then let it go.
- Celebrate their success to breed more.
- Don't fall for the old trick of them pretending a crappy job is the best they can do. They do it over until they hit the mark of the expectations you set out previously. Stand firm.

Just Say No

- Decide if a project makes your heart SING or SINK. Even if it makes you sing, say no if it will crack your fully loaded plate.
- Acknowledge their request by not laughing; address your own limitations; offer an alternative.
- *Thank you so much for asking, but I'm unavailable then.*
- *It sounds like a terrific opportunity that I'm going to miss.*
- *I know it will be a wonderful party. I'm disappointed to miss out on the fun but I have a conflict on that date.*

Interruptions

- First defense is education. "If my door is closed, I'm working."
- Set aside time when people have unconditional access to you, but be consistent and firm. Set timer.
- Give them a head's up ... "I'm going to shut my door and write starting in about 10 minutes. Do you need anything?"
- Practice your catchphrases: *I'm in the middle of something. How's 2:00? ...This week is impossible, but next Tuesday works.*
- Ask how much time they need from you. If you can spare it, set timer. Otherwise make appointment.
- Keep a log over the next week. Jot down who interrupted, how they interrupted, how long the interruption was, and how important it was. Then, schedule an intervention for them.
- Making yourself unavailable teaches others to make their own decisions and empowers them.
- Don't interrupt yourself either. When writing, never stop to look something up - don't give up momentum

Distractions

- Cousins to interruptions, but instead of being caused by other people, we create our own distractions.
- Focus and prioritize. What's the one thing you need to get done this month/week/day/hour?

Time Management Resources

- http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_HTE.htm — lots of info, much of it business-related
- <http://www.time-management-guide.com/> — lots of info but a bit superficial
- <http://www.timemanagement.com/> — also geared toward business, but good info
- <http://www.slowdownfast.com/how-can-i/> — interesting theory about slowing down to go faster. Some other interesting articles.
- <https://www.clutterdiet.com/blog/> — lots of articles, some freebie reports
- <http://www.chaostoororder.com/blog/> — interesting tips
- www.NAPO.net — National Association of Professional Organizers
- <http://www.challengingdisorganization.org> — their mission is to benefit people affected by chronic disorganization

Homework and Other *Know Thyself* Activities

- Make a more complete and thoughtful *Stuff I Want To Do Regardless of Time or Money* list
- Use a blank 5am-8pm chart for one week to see where you REALLY spent your time. Not what you were *supposed* to be doing — what you *actually* did. Be honest! Compare it to your list of *Stuff I Want To Do Regardless of Time or Money*. Will it get you there? Is your time in balance? Did it include appropriate amounts of work, physical health, filling your cup, and hanging out with people you love? If not, what areas need help? Can you exercise with a friend (health + people)? Can you watch TV/movies on the treadmill (filling your cup + health)?
- List your top three time wasters. Ask yourself — Why am I doing this? What do I gain? What is the risk? Then ask again every time you start to slip away from your plan. Keep a list next week — every time you waste time in those ways (or in delightful new ways), write down how much time slipped away. Total it up at the end of the week. That's a gift to give back to yourself by being mindful of your saboteurs.
- Write down everything you want to accomplish in the next 12 months. Don't censor and don't think about how you're going to do them. Choose the one most important to you and brainstorm how you might accomplish it, what steps to take. Again, don't censor. Choose the unlikeliest step and try it. Sometimes we need to step out of our comfort zone to see fresh ways to accomplish tasks.
- Now take that same list of what you want to accomplish in the next 12 months and for each item, list all the reasons you tell yourself you won't/can't do them. Are you being miserly with yourself? Find a way to take the time you have and do what you love.
- If you want to do a more thoughtful or thorough job on the 5am-8pm chart, here are the categories to shade in:
 1. If you have a job outside the house, shade in the hours you work — if you CAN'T carpool or take public transportation, shade in the time you commute also (if you don't have to drive, that frees up your commuting time for something else)
 2. If you work at home, shade in 6 hours OR don't shade in anything for your workday - those hours can be filled with your To Do list stuff.
 3. Shade in one hour/day for exercise. Non-negotiable. Doesn't have to be the same time every day. If you don't exercise regularly right now, just shade in one hour, but I'd advocate for it being first thing in morning.
 4. Shade in one hour for breakfast and bathing
 5. Shade in an hour for lunch (30 min for lunch plus two 15-min breaks). Promise to take your 30 min lunch and 2 breaks every day and *leave your desk*. You'll be more productive.
 6. Shade in one hour for dinner. That will include cooking/eating OR eating/cleaning. Unless you're living alone there is no reason for you to both cook and clean.
 7. If you do the menu-planning and grocery shopping, pick a day and shade in one hour to plan your weekly meals, look up recipes, and make a grocery list. Shade in another hour to do the shopping. Of course this can be two different days. And if you know shopping takes longer, then shade in another hour.
 8. Look at the list you made of *Stuff I Want To Do Regardless of Time or Money*. Shade in one hour every day for the things on that list. "Me Time" never includes any of the things already accounted for. Me Time is to do what you love. Me Time and exercise are the things you're going to be tempted to blow off. But don't. They're non-negotiable and you need to treat them as if they were your most important meeting every day. Trust me.
 9. Now put in anything else you know you have to do like if you volunteer every Tues at the food bank or go to church. Do not write in 'laundry' or 'helping with homework.' Those will be to-do list items.
 10. Shade in one hour for To Do list items, which is a constant juggling act. Prioritize, delegate, and/or delete.