

From the Heart. . .

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Time & Time Again

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Feb 1, 2013)

Have you heard this phrase recently uttered somewhere? Most of the time, it usually pops up when Mom or Dad are scolding their teen to clean up their room . . . such as, “Haven’t I told you time and time again to clean up this mess!?”

One particular definition seems to relish the verbiage in explaining this phrase as a noun. “The system of those sequential relations that any event has to any other, as past, present, or future; indefinite and continuous duration regarded as that in which events succeed one another.” What a mouthful!

I don’t think most of us need to go very far to understand “over & over” the context of “time & time again.” For many of us, we have probably been caught using it related to what is going on in our nation and politics. And not in a very positive context either. Yet, let’s look a little closer.

Time, as we all know, is a limited resource while still breathing. As we perceive time flying by at supersonic speed in our lives, Einstein’s theory of relativity (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_relativity) actually claims time passes more slowly for stationary objects than for moving objects. Thus for someone traveling fast the people around them appear to have less time. Or for someone traveling slow the people around them traveling fast appear to have

more time. For example, you travel in a spaceship at high speed for one hour, from earth and then return for one hour. The people on earth will have experienced three hours of time passage while you only experience two hours of time passage. Time is relative to the speed at which you are moving rather than the distance.

So what does this really means for us mortals who are land locked in our lifetime and not privileged to hop a spaceship? Time is still a limited resource that challenges us to use whatever time we have wisely and purposefully. I bet you have had some days where you were able to accomplish so many things you didn't think you could in such a short time period. Then there are those days where no matter how hard you try the day seems to drag with little accomplished.

What is going on there? Without trying to simplify it too much, daily life has its many surprises. Some of our most organized plans go awry with those surprises. Those are the days that you feel drags on with little accomplished you intended. Then there are those days the plans you mapped out went so smoothly, you were actually waiting for something to mess it up. At the end of the day resting in your easy chair you pondered the amazing feats you reached without a hitch with any of it. You also wish every day was like that.

Yet, we all know tomorrow may be a different story entirely. No matter how our time is limited on earth, time can also be our friend when we flow with the tide of events during each day. Yes, plan; but be ready and willing to flex. Whether a project or a relationship, each 24 hour day becomes a day of discovery with

opportunities and challenges to begin something, continue working on it, finish it, and move on to something else.

Being in the moment becomes your greatest ally no matter what is in front of you. You just then may have more days at the end of your day in your easy chair where you take a deep breath, learned some lessons, are content to let it all flow, and actually look forward to tomorrow's surprises to work and maybe even play through.

You won't need to board a spaceship to slow time down but enjoy the pace you have on terra firma as each day says hello.

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From the Heart. . .

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Timing Your Time

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When it comes to getting things done, do you let those seemingly urgent things determine how you manage your time day by day, year by year? Or are you thinking, "Who really has control over managing their time anyway? Work, school, kids, church, community volunteering, you name it, set the schedule." Yes, life happens and flexing with the surprises and shifts of some of our most treasured plans or schedule is an important and healthy part of daily living. Yet, both the schedule and life surprises are all part of the same whole.

Wikipedia's definition offers us a look into time management. "Time management is the act or process of planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency or productivity. Time management may be aided by a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects and goals complying with a due date . . . A time management system is a designed combination of processes, tools, techniques, and methods. Usually time management is a necessity in any project development as it determines the project completion time and scope."

Do you have those skills, tools, and techniques in place to accomplish what you want to see happen each day, week, month, year? These tools and

techniques are essential for “. . . planning, allocating, setting goals, delegation, analysis of time spent, monitoring, organizing, scheduling, and prioritizing.”

Exercising conscious control gives you the opportunity to actually increase your effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity with whatever you are doing. Managing your time is also for both business/work as well as personal activities.

So, my first question for you is “What one thing right now seems to consistently interfere with your best laid plans for the day, week, year?” Consider the choices you make that allow for this persistent interference to happen. Is something trying to get your attention? A change needed? A support person or team needed to help you stay on course? Or is there something you need to say goodbye to on your calendar?

Slow down for the moment and give yourself time this week to assess what is really going on. Are those “urgent” interruptions really urgent or are you just feeling the pressure from other people or self-imposed drivers? Once you spotlight what is distracting you, you are then ready to do something about it.

My next focus questions are “What do you need most for yourself?” and “What outcome do you want?” Next, “Of all the options, what is most compelling?” Choose the option that has priority. The next step will depend on how you answer the following questions:

“What do you need to do first?”

“Who or what do you need to include to succeed?”

“Who do you need to talk to?”

“And how will these actions contribute to achieving your goal of managing your time more effectively?”

As you process your answers to each question, set a goal and specific action for this coming week to address that one priority challenging your ability to manage your time.

Ask a friend or family member to help you be accountable to your goal and actions. After you achieve your goal in that one priority, reflect on how you are feeling now. Is there a positive difference in your attitude, perspective, ability to accomplish what you plan? Hopefully, you will even feel more energized to tackle other areas that need your attention in timing your time.

Next article will cover some of the tools and techniques used to manage time and life.

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From the Heart...

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Valentine's Day After

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Feb 15, 2013)

So, how was your Valentine's Day? Hope you took the time to treat someone to a special night. I sure hope you weren't one of the many who consider this holiday a waste of time and money. Loads of money may be spent but not much love felt all around for many.

Here's what Kit Yarrow, Time/Business & Money (Feb 11, 2013), found out about our attitudes toward setting aside time for this holiday. "The annual Valentine's Day spending survey from the National Retail Federation (NRF) reveals that 60% of Americans — and 91% of those in relationships — plan to celebrate the holiday to the tune of \$18.6 billion. The folks playing along will spend an average of \$131 on gifts for spouses, significant others, friends, children, parents, classmates, teachers, pets and co-workers. Average spending is expected to be up around \$4 compared with Valentine's Day last year. And yet, most of the dozens of consumers I've interviewed about Valentine's Day were tepid, at best, when asked about their feelings for the holiday."

Yarrow found out that very few considered this day a particularly romantic event. Others would tell someone they loved them all the time and didn't need a holiday to say so; and some felt forced to participate, as an obligation.

So, where do you stand on taking the time to celebrate and demonstrate your love and appreciation for someone? If there were any tips, tools, and techniques to offer in managing your time, this one would hopefully be at the top of your list. Isn't life all about relationships and taking the time to nurture those relationships?

When finding just the right tools and techniques for time management, we all need to keep our core values and relationships center stage. Here are a few key tips and tools to get you started. The first thing to make this a little easier on you is to free up some time before you tackle managing your very full daily schedule.

Look at your calendar. Is there anything on it that you can shift, delegate, or say goodbye to? Give yourself a few days to think about this. For most of us, everything on our calendar seems to scream, "I am essential. Don't cross me out!" With a little reflection over a few days you may feel otherwise and find it easier to make that shift, delegate or drop it.

Once you have that time slot free, what is the first thing you think about doing with that time? Sleep!? Chill out!? Pay bill!? Go on a hike!? Do absolutely nothing!? Now, doesn't it just feel great to have some free time?! Relish every moment while you can. Sooner more than later, something is bound to show up and fill that time without any planning at all. So, watch out for those sneaky time suckers. Decide pretty soon what you do or do not want to do with that precious time slot. A few more tips, tools, and techniques coming with the next article. Stay tuned.

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Time . . . Prescription from your Doc

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All of us know when we effectively manage our time there is less stress in our lives and hopefully healthier ones as well. So, I thought you would like to know what the Mayo Clinic offers as their tips for managing your time (source: *Time management: Tips to reduce stress and improve productivity*, Mayo Clinic staff/Basics page, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/time-management/WL00048>, June 20, 2012).

“Do you find yourself overwhelmed by the number and complexity of projects that need to be completed at work each day? As the day flies by, do you often feel as if you haven't paid enough attention to each task because other tasks keep landing on your desk, co-workers interrupt you with questions or you can't get it all organized?”

If this sounds familiar, Mayo gives some basics for managing your time, minimizing stress, and maximizing your quality of life. Mayo first asks “. . . how do you get back on track when organizational skills don't come naturally? To get started, choose one of these strategies, try it for two to four weeks and see if it helps. If it does, consider adding another one. If not, try a different one.”

- ***Plan each day.*** Planning your day can help you accomplish more and feel more in control of your life. Write a to-do list, putting the

most important tasks at the top. Keep a schedule of your daily activities to minimize conflicts and last-minute rushes.

- **Prioritize your tasks.** Time-consuming but relatively unimportant tasks can consume a lot of your day. Prioritizing tasks will ensure that you spend your time and energy on those that are truly important to you.
- **Say no to nonessential tasks.** Consider your goals and schedule before agreeing to take on additional work.
- **Delegate.** Take a look at your to-do list and consider what you can pass on to someone else.
- **Take the time you need to do a quality job.** Doing work right the first time may take more time upfront, but errors usually result in time spent making corrections, which takes more time overall.
- **Break large, time-consuming tasks into smaller tasks.** Work on them a few minutes at a time until you get them all done.
- **Practice the 10-minute rule.** Work on a dreaded task for 10 minutes each day. Once you get started, you may find you can finish it.
- **Evaluate how you're spending your time.** Keep a diary of everything you do for three days to determine how you're spending your time. Look for time that can be used more wisely. For example, could you take a bus or train to work and use the

commute to catch up on reading? If so, you could free up some time to exercise or spend with family or friends.

- **Limit distractions.** Block out time on your calendar for big projects. During that time, close your door and turn off your phone, pager and email.
- **Get plenty of sleep, eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.** A healthy lifestyle can improve your focus and concentration, which will help improve your efficiency so that you can complete your work in less time.
- **Take a time management course.** If your employer offers continuing education, take a time management class. If your workplace doesn't have one, find out if a local community college, university or community education program does.
- **Take a break when needed.** Too much stress can derail your attempts at getting organized. When you need a break, take one. Take a walk. Do some quick stretches at your workstation. Take a day of vacation to rest and re-energize.

If you are too worn out, burned out, and out of control to try any of these tips, by all means seek professional help. Mayo suggests contacting your employee assistance program (EAP) at your workplace or discuss your situation with your doctor.

I would add to those resources a professional life coach, helping you focus on what is most important to you to process through the pace that works best for

you. The outcomes will not only result in more effective use of your time, but also give you peace in the pace of your life and a healthier prospect ahead. With the coming month of March, articles will focus on the next lifeskill, *Career/Money Management*. In the meantime, think on these gems . . .

“Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work.” Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC)

“You can turn painful situations around through laughter. If you can find humor in anything, even poverty, you can survive it.” Bill Cosby

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