

## Top Ten Problems in Time Management

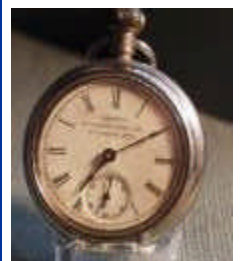
- Too much to schedule into too little time
- Overwhelmed by volume of work
- Buried under paperwork
- Unable to accomplish the really important things
- Too many distractions to follow up on (typically caused by other people)
- Projects waiting, waiting, waiting for attention
- Stop and start projects - there is always some missing link or loose end to deal with
- Multiple projects running concurrently on top of the day to day tasks
- Unable to focus, therefore unable to plan
- Not enough time to plan or organize

Do you wake up at 4am with that rush of anxiety that comes with the realization that something was forgotten, something was left undone?

I have experienced all of the same challenges with managing time that my clients now seek my coaching support for. What has changed for me? How is it that I can now run my own business and successfully coach clients from their place of overwhelm to a place of feeling in control of their workloads? I simply changed my attitude towards time.

Unfortunately, my new way of being with time was born out of necessity. While employed in the corporate world, I worked hard all day to keep control of all the projects, details, interruptions, urgencies, communications, etc. and then I worked long into the night and on weekends when I could have uninterrupted time for projects that required more of my focus. I fit it all in....and then my body collapsed. Apparently this style of time management isn't very healthy! While taking sick leave, I had the time to reflect on my life and realized that I wasn't very happy and I wasn't doing the things that bring fulfillment into my life.

The constant chant of our work lives is that we need to manage our time. I realize now that what really needs to be managed is our *intentions*. Getting more done in less time for the sake of getting more done in less time is a hollow accomplishment and in the long run, doesn't maintain a very compelling reason to work so hard. Purpose and vision, the foundation of intentional actions, are cornerstones of a more fulfilling life. When planning and work are done with intention, we connect with the richness of our lives.



## The Distinction Between Planning Time & Creating Intentional Time

Have you ever started your day with a list of things to accomplish and at day's end, none of these tasks were accomplished? It seems a waste of time to write these to-do lists when they never get done. The solution: to improve time management don't write to-do lists. Based on this argument, some people abandon the thought of planning because planning is equated with the never ending and disappointing to-do list. The other problem is that many people just don't feel they have the time to plan.

Several of my clients have exclaimed, "but I do plan! I think about work when I'm driving, or when I'm on the treadmill." The state of preoccupation that most of us live in (thinking about work in the shower, in the car, in bed at 4am) is not planning. This is just an inefficient state of distraction. There is no clarity to be found here, just worry.

I suggest that while planning is an important element, it is far more effective when taken to a deeper level. Planning is more productive and produces many benefits when it is based on what is most important; when it is based on your sense of purpose and your values. This article explores the 5 steps for creating intentional time and covers some pointers on how to avoid procrastination and how to manage multiple projects.

### A New Way of Planning: Creating Intentional Time

In this world of infinite possibilities and opportunities, wouldn't it be great to feel like you were in control, that you had the power to choose and that you were truly spending your time doing the things that matter?

**Intentional Time** is my term for time spent with a higher purpose in mind. This is time planned from the perspective of balance. This is time that expands your energy rather than depletes it. Intentional time supports a whole life and creates a better sense of control because it is time of your choosing and time spent doing what is important to you. Intentional time gives a context to your day, your week and your life.

When you are intentionally planning your time, you are more likely to attend to what is important and worthwhile in the bigger picture of your life than to get caught up in the small and somewhat insignificant details. From an intentional perspective you are better equipped to make decisions regarding what you will put your energy towards and what doesn't fit.

### The Five Steps for Creating Intentional Time

1. Identify your Big A Agenda - values, mission and vision.
2. Identify the roles that serve and fulfill
3. Set intentional goals - What is most important?
4. Make Big A Choices - Stay in the moment
5. Evaluate, learn, and adjust - to keep on course

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## Step 1: What is your Big A Agenda?

Your **Big A Agenda** is the big picture of your life. Your Big A Agenda is what will have you most fulfilled and where you find balance. What is all this work you are doing in service of?

It is difficult to enjoy work and life when the pressure of too many things to schedule into a typical day increases our anxiety levels. This dissatisfaction grows particularly when work takes over the rest of our lives and we stop doing the things that bring us joy. We wonder, "is it worth all it?" The antidote to this is to reconnect with what is important in your life. What is the context in which you live your life? What is the context in which you do your work? What is most important?

Knowing the answers to these questions will impact the goals you set and the choices you make. Knowing the answers to these questions gives you the foundation from which to schedule your appointments and plan your activities in a way that honours your purpose.

A great place to start is to look at what is important to you and look at what you long to do.

- What is it you desire to have in your life that you don't seem to have the time for?
- What is your Big Dream?
- What do you want your life and work to look and feel like?

Having a vision and mission statement for your life will anchor you to your sense of purpose. Developing your vision and mission is a great way to reconnect with what is truly most important and motivating to you. It is a great way to realign with your core values.

An example of a vision statement:

To live a life of joy and bring joy into the lives of others.

An example of a mission statement:

My mission is to create open spaces for communication and to be an innovator who inspires creativity and change in my work place and community. I will honour my values of integrity, creativity, gratitude, kindness, family, joy and fun, and in doing so, I enrich my life and the lives of those I love and those I work with.

**Hot Tip:** You can ask these types questions and set up a vision and mission statement for a particular project (very useful for large projects involving a team).

**Use Exercise 2: *Identifying your Big A Agenda to help you identify what is most important and fulfilling for you. (Use the appended template)***

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## Step 2: Identify the Roles that Serve and Fulfill

Your roles are the areas that make up your life. These areas may include parent, manager, team coach, community volunteer, and the often forgotten personal role - a role involving the development of ourselves. When we are feeling dissatisfied or unfulfilled in our lives it is usually because we are spending time in one role at the expense of others. Too often, we give far more energy to the unimportant and the small urgencies that flood into our days, while we neglect to attend to what serves and fulfills us. This is equally true when you look just at your various work roles.

- How do the roles you have in your life and work fulfill your vision and mission?
- What current roles and responsibilities serve your Big A Agenda and which do not?
- Which roles and responsibilities can you let go of in honour of your Big A Agenda?
- Where are you going to choose to focus your attention?

**Exercise:** List all of your responsibilities and categorize these into roles. Next, evaluate these roles and determine which ones serve your Big A Agenda and which no longer serve you.

## Step 3: Set Intentional Goals - What is most important?

When setting goals for each of your roles consider what is most important. In their book, *First Things First*, (Simon & Schuster, 1994) Covey, Merrill and Merrill suggest asking yourself this question:

**“What is the most important thing I could do in each role this week to have the greatest positive impact?”**

The key to success in this planning step is to be intentional. Really give thought to what is most important. Check in with your values and mission. Focus on what is important rather than what is urgent. What is going to have this time really be aligned with your purpose?

Stephen Covey calls these “Quadrant II Goals”. According to Covey, the Quadrants of time management can be categorized as follows:

**Quadrant I** - Urgent and Important: crisis, pressing problems, deadline-driven projects, meetings.

**Quadrant II** - Important and Not Urgent: planning, prevention, values clarification, relationship building, empowerment, true re-creation (vs/ mindless recreation)

**Quadrant III** - Urgent and Not Important: interruptions, some phone calls, same mail, some reports, some meetings, many proximate and pressing matters

**Quadrant IV** - Not Urgent and Not Important: trivia, busywork, junk mail, time wasters, some phone calls, escape activities.



The goal is to spend as much time in **Quadrant II**. This is where your Big A Agenda comes to life. This is the place that adds richness to your life. These are the goals we tend to push aside for the urgent activities. Unfortunately, many of the urgent activities that take up our time are not important and do not add fulfillment to our work and our lives.

The simple act of taking the time to ask the question, “What is most important?” will help you to build intentional time into your days and avoid the trap of getting caught up in what is urgent, yet not in service of your Big A Agenda.

Put this into action by choosing to put the Big Picture Goals into your schedule first. Let these be your priorities. Create strong boundaries around each of these goals by connecting to your purpose. Leave time for the urgencies and the less important actions and tasks (most meetings, important interruptions and the routine tasks).

**Use Exercise 3: *Big Picture Goals* to list out your important Big A Agenda roles and the most important goals for each role. (Use the appended template)**

## Step 4: Make Big A Choices - Stay in the Moment

Planning from your Big A Agenda perspective empowers you to make choices regarding which goals to put your attention to. This is easily accomplished when you are planning in advance, but how will you keep on course and in the Quadrant II zone during a typical day of interruptions and meetings?

Creating intentional time is a moment by moment activity. Each moment gives you the opportunity to stop and ask, “What is important and how does this fit with the bigger picture?” When you are presented with a decision to make, such as, “can I just have a bit of your time to look over these files?” you have the chance to make a choice and choose what is going to be the most fulfilling in your roles.

To illustrate how this works, consider that part of your Big A Agenda is to contribute to the growth and joys of your children, to take the best care of yourself and to contribute to the innovation of your company. You have a big project with a due date at the beginning of the next week. You also know that at some point in the future you should start a new marketing campaign to a new region. While doing something else (possibly on the internet) you see something that triggers you to think about this marketing campaign and you follow the lead and next thing you know you are following internet links and making phone calls regarding this possible-sometime-in-the-future marketing campaign.

Forty-five minutes just rolled by and now you are faced with having to work overtime to get this other project with a looming deadline completed. While the marketing campaign is important, it is not important now. Knowing that you scheduled what *is* important for this week gives you the opportunity to make a choice in honour of your Big A Agenda in the moment. Planning from the Big A Agenda can also help avoid this situation, because you would have already scheduled a time for this marketing campaign in the future.

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The point of choice in this scenario was with the initial trigger to start working on the marketing campaign. This was the point to check in with your Big A Agenda and remind yourself that you want to contribute to your children's lives and that you want to care for yourself so that you can be around to meet your grandchildren.

You have an opportunity to take control and decide which is most important to you - completing the project in a timely manner so that you can get home to spend quality time with your kids and get in some exercise and relaxation, or putter around on a task that is neither a priority or urgent thereby causing you to now have to work late and on the weekend.

By using a greater context as the framework for your work tasks and priorities, it becomes easier to make choices that serve both your work and your life and you create a more compelling reason to be intentional about how you schedule your time.

## Step 5: Evaluate, Learn, Adjust - to keep on course

Staying on purpose in your life and work is a process of learning and growing. Mistakes will be made and you will veer off your course. What keeps the process going and keeps you on purpose is the use of ongoing evaluation.

An inquiry to consider: **What is it to be on purpose?**

Some possible answers to this inquiry might include:

To be on purpose is....

- to be drawn forward
- to learn and grow
- to be courageous
- to be persistent

Evaluation is your opportunity to take the experiences of one week and turn them into a plan for increased effectiveness the following week. When you evaluate what happened over the past week, you create opportunities for learning. By taking mistakes and missteps and turning them into new action plans, you create opportunities for you to grow.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What did I achieve?
- What challenges did I face?
- What empowered me to accomplish these goals?
- Were these accomplishments the best use of my time?
- Which goals did I not achieve?
- What prevented me from achieving them?
- How did the choices I made impact my week?
- How in alignment am I with my Big A Agenda?
- What did I learn from this week?
- Am I setting realistic goals?
- Am I allotting enough time for planning?
- What boundaries can I make to keep myself on course?
- How will I modify my planning?

Evaluation is your opportunity to take the experiences of one week and turn them into a plan for increased effectiveness the following week.



The Evaluation process is what closes the loop on the work cycle. Including an evaluation process into your work week will naturally encourage you to follow through on your intentional planning time because when you are evaluating what worked and what didn't you are setting the foundation for planning your next week.



## Sources and Resources:

### My favourite books on the subject are....

*First Things First*, Covey, Merrill & Merrill; Simon & Schuster, 1994.

*Time Management from the Inside Out*, Julie Morgenstern; Henry Holt & Co., 2000.

*Beyond Time Management: Business with Purpose*, Robert Wright; Butterworth-Heinemann, 1997.

*Getting a Project Done on Time: Managing People, Time, and Results*, Paul Williams; AMACOM, 1996.

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**For more resources and to learn more about The Surge Group visit [www.surgestrategies.com](http://www.surgestrategies.com)**



## Quick Tips: How to Stay in the Process of Creating Intentional Time

- The glue that holds it all together is having a ROUTINE
- Fill in your schedule with the Big A Agenda goals first,
- Start your week with a plan; end your week with a review
- Start your day by checking in with your Big A Agenda - vision, mission, values
- Establish a habit of Do It Now for the day to day tasks (schedule time for this)
- Set a weekly organizing time to keep your long-term flow of work under control
- Include the hidden time costs into scheduling (snack time, set-up time, clean up time)
- Think of your work to be done in terms of work cycles:
  - each task has a beginning middle and end
  - each task requires prep-time set up time and completion time
  - weeks and projects require planning time, action time and evaluation time
- When work piles up, don't allow weeks to go by before getting reorganized, do it now
- Learn to set boundaries and learn to delegate
  - use language that clearly lets people know that you need to focus now and lets them know you do wish to talk with them...only at a more convenient time for you
  - Don't take on other people's work - empower them to do their own work
  - Don't train people into thinking they can interrupt you at any time with their needs - train them to know that you can help...later at a scheduled time
  - Schedule regular meetings at the same time each week for non-priority items that need resolution, thus avoiding the unscheduled random pop-ins
- Streamline routine tasks: rather than do them randomly, batch them
  - Process similar communications and tasks in batches
  - Do filing all at once
  - Take and return calls a specified times during the day
  - Read and answer emails in batches
  - Deal with mail in one go at one time during the day
  - Schedule time for these batches a couple times a day
- Use a filing system that works
- Use directories and sub-directories for computer files
- Manage your email
  - do it now; delete it now: avoid the clutter of un-read and un-acted on emails
  - messages you keep should be stored in folders
- When sending email
  - discuss one subject per message
  - clearly define the topic in the subject line
  - keep messages brief and include all the info necessary for recipient to act
- Set up electronic directories that parallel your working files
- Establish a Do It Now attitude to voice mail messages
  - leave as complete a message as possible to avoid unnecessary call-backs
  - if you need to follow up later, schedule it in your calendar, delete message
- Deal with in-basket papers once - do it now or deal with it as completely as possible and put it in a pending tray. File or destroy it when it is complete
- Overcome info overload by stopping the low-value info from entering your system
  - Create a system that does not allow unfiltered info to arrive on your desk
  - Have support staff screen the info
  - Remove self from unnecessary distribution lists

## Exercise 1: Time Management Evaluate What is not Working for You

*Give as many answers as you can to the following questions:*

I spend too much time on...

I have a hard time completing...

I never have time to...

I have a hard time saying no to...

One thing I wish I could accomplish every day is...

I procrastinate whenever I have to...

I'm typically late for...

I don't have defined goals for...

I have a hard time delegating...

What overwhelms me is...



## Exercise 2

### Identifying your Big A Agenda from a Whole Life Perspective

***This is where you get to dream big and identify what will have you most fulfilled in the following areas of your life.***

*HINT: Fulfillment typically comes from living by your core values and fulfilling some sense of purpose rather than obtaining material goods or status. Incorporate your deeply held preferences, your skills your values.*

Career:

Family & Friends:

Significant Other/Romance:

Fun & Recreation:

Health:

Money:

Personal Growth:

Physical Environment:

**What are the values that seem to be present in your answers?**



### Exercise 3: Identify Your Big Picture Goals

*Identify your responsibilities, your relationships and your areas of contribution. These inform your big picture goals. Big Picture clarity provides the framework for creating balance. When goals grow out of your vision and mission, you gain perspective and give your weekly planning a greater, more purposeful context.*

Big Picture Roles	Goals
▶	
▶	
▶	
▶	
▶	
▶	
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