

PRIME Time:

*The Power of
Effective Planning*

RIA STORY

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ISBN: 0692710035

ISBN-13: 978-0692710036

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to those who are ready to live life like it
is meant to be lived.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There simply isn't room to thank and acknowledge everyone who helped me get to where I am today. However, I would like to specifically acknowledge my husband, Mack, for the endless hours spent proof-reading, editing, clarifying, coaching, talking, listening, and being the best cheerleader ever.

CHAPTER ONE
WHAT GOT ME HERE?

“The challenge of a work-life balance is without question one of the most significant struggles of modern man.”

~Stephen R. Covey

I call it the “whirlwind life.”

You feel like you are living life in a tornado.

The vast majority of people in our society today are overcommitted, overstressed, overscheduled, too tired, and too busy. Most of them will tell you they don’t like it. Either, they don’t know how to change it, or they aren’t willing to. The former problem can be corrected by reading this book or by moving permanently to a deserted island where you are the sole inhabitant and completely cut off from all communication with the outside world.

The latter problem can only be corrected when the person *is* willing to change.

Change isn’t easy. It always requires more effort to make changes than it does to maintain the status quo. Changing your life is going to require energy, effort, self-discipline, and of course, time.

Work-life balance. It sounds good, like most lofty ideals do. But, how many of us have a good work-life balance? The term “work-life balance” assumes there is a life in there somewhere among all the work. However, for many of us, actually getting to the “life” part (or getting there with enough energy to enjoy it) is our biggest challenge. How often are you too exhausted by the end of

the workweek to really enjoy Saturday morning spent with the kids because you are too busy catching up on laundry or working in the yard? There simply wasn't enough time to do your chores during the week. Or, you worked 10 plus hours per day at the office/job and still brought work home with you, so you could catch up.

Warning signs and symptoms that you may be experiencing the "whirlwind life" include: always running late or behind schedule, total exhaustion at the end of each and every day, forgetting commitments or appointments, and/or finding yourself unprepared for the day. (Like the time I was 100% committed to going to the gym, but realized when I got there, I didn't bring sneakers.)

The solution is simple. We need to manage time better, right?

Wrong. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

In reality, no one can manage time. We can't buy it. We can't save it. We can't get it back. However, we can waste it. We can spend it. Or, we can invest it.

There is an entire industry focused on "Time Management." Millions of dollars are spent every year on planners, calendars, time tracking apps and time budgeting software. There are literally hundreds of books on how to manage your time better, how to track where your time goes, and how to do it more efficiently. We hear phrases that sound great: "Work-life balance" or "Manage your time, manage your life."

Sometimes, on the surface, the warning signs and symptoms seem easy to fix. For example, if you are always late to everything, it seems relatively easy to simply leave earlier.

There are two fundamental root causes for chronically being late:

1) Not budgeting enough time for activities

This can happen sometimes when we simply don't know how much time a task will require.

A great example of this is grocery shopping. I may plan for a 30 minute trip to the grocery store because I don't realize going to the grocery store on Friday afternoon at 5 pm is going to take longer than 30 minutes, plus the drive time will be longer with rush hour traffic. So, it takes me 90 minutes when I had only planned for 30, leaving my entire afternoon squashed into whatever time remains.

This problem can be solved by reflecting on how much time you are spending on your current activities and evaluating carefully which planning changes must be made. Be honest with yourself as you review your schedule. Do you KNOW the trip to the dentist will only take 1 hour or are you simply guessing? If you aren't 100% sure, budget a little extra time for it and don't plan something immediately afterward. It's also important to make sure you are planning for travel time between appointments, work, or classes.

Remember too, you can't always plan for people. There will be times when you need to spend a little more time than planned with someone and cannot "budget" your time with them. Make sure you are planning a little personal time when you are dealing with others. For example, I always plan an extra 30 minutes in my calendar for a workshop, so I'm available afterward for questions people may have. This way, I'm not rushing to my next appointment, and I have time to follow up with the audience.

2) Saying yes to everything

This is more common and more difficult to change.

If we are juggling too many things, sooner or later, something will get dropped. This could be saying yes to too many big things, like work, school, and family. But, it could also be saying yes to too many little things, like time on the phone with friends, playing games, or watching TV.

Sometimes, it's not *knowing* that you need to say no. Sometimes, it's not having the *courage* to say no.

I'm very careful about what I commit to. I declined an invitation to brunch recently because it was at 10:30 am, and I had a 12 pm client scheduled. It would have been very difficult to have brunch and be on time for my appointment. So, I gracefully said, "Let's do it another time, please."

We have to be very careful about what we commit to. Don't say yes to something unless you are completely dedicated to carrying it out. Once you commit, if you don't follow through or are late, it's a withdrawal from the relational trust account. I very rarely make commitments on the spot. I ask to follow up with the person, so I can check my calendar and other commitments first. This way, I don't feel pressured to make a decision on the spot that I will regret later.

Of course, all of this is very easy to say. But often, it's very difficult to do. I'll focus on that in later chapters.

There are other signs relating to the "whirlwind life." What if you aren't always running late for an appointment, but you find yourself working on emails at home at 11 pm in an effort to simply catch up. You spent

the entire workday in meetings of some sort. Then, you had to rush to get supper ready for the kids and finally, exhausted, you sit down with your laptop after everyone else is asleep and pick up where you left off. You crash sometime around midnight and get up at 6 am to do it all over again.

You never seem to have the time for exercise or healthy eating. As a result, you have less energy, and the pounds start piling on. With a sigh, you tell yourself you will start another diet, right after...

In an effort to “manage time,” we struggle to make lists and use planners that don’t effectively help us identify our main goals and the tasks for each goal in each area of life. Sometimes, we haven’t set those goals. Therefore, we don’t know what we want to be working toward. Other times, we haven’t taken the time to identify what is truly important. For some people, it’s easier to live with chaos in their life rather than grow through the pain of change in order to reduce or eliminate the chaos.

Think back to what your grandparents might call the “good ol’ days” where life was simply slower. They did everything by hand, without the benefit of the technology we enjoy today. Washing clothes meant dragging out a washboard and tub, and then, hanging clothes out on the line to dry. Families worked together, played together, ate together, and worshipped together.

Evolution of Time Management

The evolution of “time management” over the years is interesting. The first method for managing time involves creating a “to do” list. You put everything you need to do on the list, so you won’t forget. Whatever doesn’t get done at the end of the day is put on the list for tomorrow.

Priorities are not determined. It simply all needs to get done, so you start at the top and work your down. Then, when you are about halfway down the list, you realize you finished a task that wasn't even on the list. So, you add it to the list simply for the satisfaction of crossing it off.

The second method of time management efforts involve more planning and preparing. You schedule everything, and if something isn't scheduled, it doesn't get done. There isn't any room for anything extra because every single minute is scheduled. And, we feel pressured to live by the schedule we created. There isn't any flexibility. Surprises of any kind are your worst enemy.

The third method of time management efforts involve both of the first two methods and adds the control element. You set goals, large and small, and work to accomplish them using a to-do list, planner, and calendar. You don't permit disruptions or unplanned activities because that would mean you are jeopardizing your goals. You are laser focused – to the point where you miss out on the spontaneity of an unplanned Saturday.

The problem is the most important things in life don't fit neatly into a planner. Your teenager might be suffering a life crisis, but you are too busy to notice. Or, you notice, but tell yourself you don't have time to talk to him right now. That deadline for work is in sight, and you need to put in a few extra hours.

There is always pressure to get more done, to be more, to do more, to have more, and to accomplish more. Believe me, I know.

For a long time, I tried to be the “Super Achiever” of the year because I felt like I had to prove something to myself and to everyone else. I wanted to make up for the lost years growing up when I had lived with my parents,

virtually as a prisoner of my dad's abuse and his controlling behaviors.

I felt the need to prove I was worth something by accomplishing something.

It's difficult, I know. As a self-employed entrepreneur, I spend at least twice as many hours working now as I did when I had a "real job." Work consumes my life because there is always pressure to be writing, reading, posting quotes, inspiring people, meeting new people, speaking about my story, or publishing the next book. There are always people out there I want to reach with a message of hope. The pressure is there to not let them down, so I must always be reaching out.

I've learned it's important to plan my priorities instead of prioritizing my planning. It's simple but not easy. I know, it's much easier said than done. But, it can be done. I have learned to do it.

It's how I managed to get through graduate school while working a full-time and a part-time job, while training for and running my first marathon, while training for and winning four state mountain biking championships, while also balancing my role as wife, step-mother, chief cook and bottle washer, while also volunteering as a secretary for a non-profit organization in my community and writing the grant application for a successful Recreational Trails Program \$100,000 grant. I was doing all of this simultaneously.

It's not because I'm superwoman. I simply learned how to manage my life. Then, I did it.

Does it sound too good to be true? It's not. It can be done. But, I won't promise it will be easy. If we want different results, we must do things differently. Making some of the changes in this book will require you to think deeply about what you truly want, what you truly value,

and what you are truly willing to do to get it. You must be willing to make decisions, sometimes difficult decisions.

It won't happen overnight, and you won't get it right all of the time. None of us do. But, there is hope. So, stop waiting for the right time or a better time. Stop waiting for next year or soccer season to end. Stop putting off the important things in your life in order to do the pressing things.

This book is not for everyone. There are some people who will simply wish for life to be better or different but aren't committed to change. If you are looking for a quick-fix or an instant cure, this book is not for you.

Each section in this book has valuable information and a supporting exercise. Read the chapter. Then, complete the exercise. It's tempting to rush through the exercises or skip them entirely. You will get as much out of this book as you put into it. If you rush through the sections in an effort to get done, you will get very little from this book. Life likely won't change, and you will have simply spent some of your precious time wishing for life to be different or better instead of taking action to make it different or better.

The choice is yours – and as much as I would like to, I can't do it for you. You are the one in control of your life. Or, if you aren't in control of your life, you are the only one who can gain control of your life.

It's your life.

It's time to stop going through the motions each day.

It's time to create the life you want.

It's time to stop trying to manage time.

It's time to start managing your life.

It's time to start leading yourself.

CHAPTER TWO

IDENTIFY THE GAP

“To live is to choose. But to choose well, you must know who you are and what you stand for, where you want to go and why you want to get there.”

~Kofi Annan

Some of you may not know or remember it, but there was a time when road trips were a little more complicated than they are now. Back then, going on a trip was a true test of communication in your marriage.

Quite a few years ago, Mack and I took his son, Eric, on vacation to Tampa Florida. We planned to do some kayaking or canoeing, visit Busch Gardens, and do some sightseeing. We filled the car with our bags, packed a cooler with snacks, and took off down the road with our trusty atlas. In those days, traveling didn't involve a cell phone or a GPS. You needed an atlas to navigate the major highways and make sure you were headed down the right road. An atlas would have maps of the major roads but usually didn't include a detailed map of the city, unless it was a major city. Even then, there was always the risk of the atlas being out of date, or the roads had changed.

We made it to Tampa without any problem and stopped at a gas station when we got to the city. We had to buy a map of Tampa, so we would know how to get to our hotel. With Mack driving, it was my job to navigate. I unfolded the map carefully as we started into the city. Since Tampa is a large city, the map was also large.

I had the address for the hotel where we were staying and was able to locate the street on the map in just a few minutes. But, as Mack kept driving, I realized we had a slight problem.

I didn't know where we were.

I knew the major interstate we had driven down, but I wasn't paying attention to where we got off and where we had stopped for gas and a map.

After a few minutes of driving in silence, Mack asked me, "Where should I turn?"

My reply, "We are looking for the street our hotel is on."

"I know that," he said, somewhat exasperated. "What road do I turn on to get there?"

Silence filled the car for a moment.

"I don't know," I finally confessed.

"What do you mean you don't know? Just look on the map, and tell me what road to turn on." After being in the car for seven hours, the temperature was heating up, and I don't mean on the thermostat.

"I am looking at the map!" I exclaimed, hurt that he questioned my ability to read the map.

"Well, you aren't looking at it if you don't know what road we need to take."

"I know what road to take," I huffed, "I just don't know what road we are on now."

We eventually saw a sign at an intersection that helped us figure out where we were, and then, we were able to find the right road to our hotel. It was an important lesson: The best map isn't any good if you don't know where you are and where you want to go.

These days, when you take a road trip, you can get turn by turn guidance from Siri or the little man living inside your TomTom. But, in your life today, just like taking a road trip years ago, you must identify where you

are and where you want to go, before you can get there.

Once you have done that, you can identify the gap between where you are and where you want to be. In technical terms, we could call this “THE GAP ANALYSIS,” which is a fancy term for “from here to there.”

When you have margin, you have room to manage what you can’t plan for. *Margin* is having something held in reserve as a contingency for when the unexpected happens.

If you don’t have a time margin, then a detour on your way to a meeting will throw you off completely. If you don’t have a financial margin, then an unexpected illness and a few days of missed work will cause you to miss paying the bills this month. If you don’t have an emotional margin, then the slight fender bender in the parking lot will cause you to have a complete meltdown.

When we don’t have any margin, there is no room for the unexpected. And, the unexpected will occur, sooner or later.

It makes sense that having some margin in our lives is a good thing. But, it doesn’t happen accidentally and certainly takes some work.

Some of you will be tempted to rush right through this section, scanning the statements and mentally noting a few areas where you may feel less than perfect. Let me warn you – don’t do it. Remember, the tools in this book are only helpful when applied. They won’t do you a bit of good if you rush through the exercises, writing it off as just one more task to cross off your list today.

Stop at this section and don’t go any further until you have had a chance to reflect on the following assessment and honestly evaluate your satisfaction with each area or dimension.

There are four dimensions of life: Physical, Spiritual, Mental, and Relational. All four areas are interrelated.

Much like a wheel, your life won't be smooth if you are not somewhat rounded. Being in harmony in your social/relational life doesn't justify being out of harmony in your physical life.

It's great if you have a happy marriage and happy kids. But if you have a heart condition due to poor lifestyle choices, you won't be able to enjoy those relationships.

We aren't striving for perfection here – it doesn't exist – but, we are seeking awareness. Where are you today, and where do you want to be tomorrow?

Exercise 1: Abundant Life Assessment

This assessment is a tool to help you identify the areas of life where you are satisfied, and also, the areas of life where you want to create positive change. It is simply an awareness exercise - there are no right or wrong answers, just a need to be completely honest with yourself. There is no grade, score, or reason to feel like you don't "measure up" because you, and only you, can truly say whether you are where you want to be in each area. Rate each area from 1 – 5, with 1 being "Much room for improvement." and 5 being "Completely satisfied with this area."

If you don't feel like you can thoroughly think through this exercise right now, go on about your day and spend some quiet time on this tomorrow.

Spiritual	
I have a deeply connected spiritual relationship with my spiritual source.	1 2 3 4 5
I practice my spiritual practices and beliefs daily.	1 2 3 4 5
I live in complete accord with my spiritual beliefs and values.	1 2 3 4 5
My spiritual values and beliefs define my decisions in life.	1 2 3 4 5
Others see evidence of my spiritual values in my daily walk.	1 2 3 4 5
I depend on my spiritual source for renewal.	1 2 3 4 5
I continually seek spiritual growth and development.	1 2 3 4 5
I have dedicated time each day to reflect on my spiritual journey.	1 2 3 4 5
I have a deep sense of harmony and alignment with my spiritual values.	1 2 3 4 5

Others would define me as spiritually at peace.	1 2 3 4 5
How does this compare with where you want to be?	

Mental/Emotional/Personal	
I have a personal growth and development plan.	1 2 3 4 5
I have long and short term goals, written and regularly reviewed.	1 2 3 4 5
I learn something inspirational or informational each day.	1 2 3 4 5
I know what my values are.	1 2 3 4 5
I consistently say “no” to things that are not in alignment with my values.	1 2 3 4 5
My daily activities are fulfilling.	1 2 3 4 5

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I practice gratitude daily.	1 2 3 4 5
I have regular, dedicated time for personal renewal (vacation, meditation, reflection time, planning, goal setting) each week and annually.	1 2 3 4 5
I am living in accordance with my purpose and potential.	1 2 3 4 5
I am living within my budget and living my financial plan.	1 2 3 4 5
How does this compare with where you want to be?	

Physical	
I am within the recommended weight guidelines for my gender, age, and height.	1 2 3 4 5
I drink water instead of soda, sugary beverages, or juice, most of the time.	1 2 3 4 5
I make healthy food choices and limit fast	1 2 3 4 5

food or junk food.	
I do cardiovascular training/exercises at least three times per week.	1 2 3 4 5
I do stretching or flexibility exercises at least three times per week.	1 2 3 4 5
I do strength training/exercises at least twice per week.	1 2 3 4 5
I don't overindulge in any food, and I don't eat for comfort or boredom.	1 2 3 4 5
I get enough sleep.	1 2 3 4 5
My physical environment (work, home, car, desk) reflects harmony and is uncluttered and organized.	1 2 3 4 5
I enjoy fresh air outside daily.	1 2 3 4 5
How does this compare with where you want to be?	

Relational/ Social	
All of my friendships/relationships are positive influences in my life.	1 2 3 4 5
I am a positive influence in the lives of those around me.	1 2 3 4 5
I spend as much time as I need to, and want to, with my immediate family.	1 2 3 4 5
I am constantly seeking how to be a better person for each of my roles: spouse, parent, employee, boss, friend, sibling, etc.	1 2 3 4 5
I resolve relational conflicts immediately.	1 2 3 4 5
I live up to commitments made, to others and self, with integrity.	1 2 3 4 5
I actively support the dreams, goals, and aspirations of the people in my life.	1 2 3 4 5
Others would describe me as positive.	1 2 3 4 5
I have a mentor relationship that supports me.	1 2 3 4 5
There is no one in my life I need to forgive, including myself.	1 2 3 4 5

How does this compare with where you
want to be?

CHAPTER THREE

PRIME TIME

“Lack of direction, not lack of time, is the problem. We all have twenty-four hour days.”

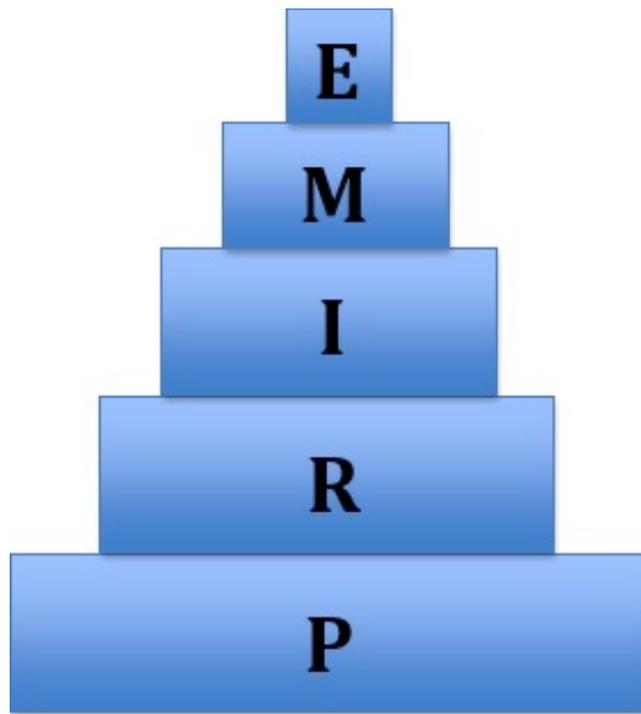
~Zig Ziglar

We can categorize activities and the way we spend our time into five basic blocks (1-5). Each block has different characteristics. Activities in each block will bring a different return on investment. In other words, time spent on activities in one block will have greater value than time spent on activities in another block.

Each of us must decide which activities belong in each block. The answer will be slightly different for everyone and is based on each individual's values.

Think about a set of five different blocks, each one smaller than the one before it. If you stack them with the largest block on the bottom and subsequent blocks on top getting progressively smaller, it will be stable. It would look like the following illustration. Stable. Steady. Solid.

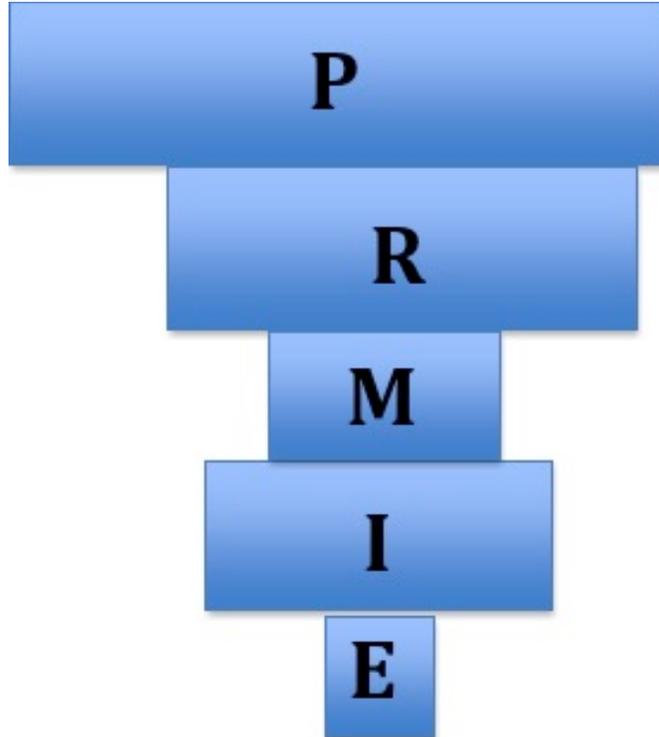
It's built with a firm foundation, and each block is in its proper place. The largest block consists of the activities that provide the greatest return for time spent there.



PRIME Time

When you are living each day with the blocks stacked in the correct order, you are living in “PRIME Time.”

However, if you try to stack the smaller blocks on the bottom and the larger blocks on top, it will be a very unstable structure and will come crashing down, sooner or later.



PRIME is an acrostic that stands for:

P = Power (Purpose, Passion, & Productive)
R = Restorative (Renewal, Recreation, & Reproduction)
I = Incongruous (Insignificant, Immaterial, & Ineffective)
M = Marginal (Manic, Minimal, & Messy)
E = Expendable (Empty, Excessive, & Erratic)

Power Block

Power activities are results related. Activities in this block are in your strength zone, where your activities are in alignment with your core values, purpose, and passion.

Working in the Power block requires more initiative because you must be able to say “No” to time consuming activities in other blocks.

If we are not clear which priorities we should be acting on, we frequently become involved in activities that are not aligned with our values.

Examples of time spent working in the Power block include: fulfilling work (in alignment with your purpose/passion), adding value to someone else, creating, writing, preparing for something, building, or designing. Power activities can also be activities spent on producing something. Ideally, you would spend 80% of your time in the Power block and the Restorative block.

The Power block is where you want to focus the majority of your efforts, energy, and time. The more time you spend here, the less time you spend on other things that are farther away from your core and central focus.

Restorative Block

Restorative activities are the recreational activities that help you find renewal and rejuvenation. Time spent here allows you to “re-create” yourself and helps you remain balanced. This allows you to focus better when you are working in the Power block.

Restorative activities are the things that help you find restoration physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually.

Examples of time spent in the Restorative block include: family time, adequate sleep, prayer, meditation, recreation, sports, and exercise. It’s important to note that all of these activities are good, up to a point. If you are sleeping 7-8 hours per night, that’s time in the Restorative zone. If you are sleeping 15 hours a night, that extra sleep falls into the Expendable block.

Restoration is an important part of balance, and we need it in order to maintain our health long term. But, if we spend too much time there, we’ve moved beyond the Restorative block.

Your goal should be to spend non-Power block time here.

Incongruous Block

Incongruous activities can be any activity not in alignment with your core values. It is not necessarily a bad activity, it’s simply not in alignment with your values, goals, and mission. It’s centered on something other than your values, so it is “non-value centered.” These activities may be popular with other people but not necessarily important to you.

I had the opportunity to decline a job last year. It was

a pretty good job as jobs go, but it wasn't in alignment with my core values. The job itself wasn't bad – it simply wasn't going to move me in the right direction. Accepting it would have been Incongruous for me because it would have caused me to spend a third of 24 hour day out of alignment. I chose to say “no” to that opportunity, so I could spend more of my time in my Power block.

Marginal Block

Marginal activities are those activities and situations where you are “just getting by.” Often, they are created as a direct result of not spending enough time in the Restorative or Power blocks. Health is a good example. If you regularly exercise and eat a healthy diet (Restorative activity), you are probably going to spend much less time in the Marginal block as a result of health problems.

Crisis situations are in the Marginal block – where you failed to act until it became an urgent problem. Crisis situations act on us. We don't have to go searching for them. Crisis situations cause us to respond.

Examples of Marginal block situations are deadline driven projects, immediate attention projects, ringing phones, a last minute school project etc. These are the fires that must be put out and often appear without any notice. The unanticipated interruptions, the immediate problems, and things that you must address right away.

Marginal activities aren't bad – but if you spend all your time in this block, you won't have any time to spend in the Power or Restorative block. As a result, you will spend more time in the Marginal block.

Expendable Block

Expendable activities are purely time wasters. These are the fruitless or pointless activities that bring us no value. Activities in this block could be some of the same activities as those in the Restorative block, but too much of them moves them into the Expendable block. Activities in this block are often fun, easy, and can be addictive, but they bring absolutely no return on the investment of your time.

Some examples include: Too much time on social media, endless hours of TV every night, sleeping more than you need to, gossip, and even some relationships could be Expendable. Relationships that are toxic, negative, or unhealthy are prime examples of time spent in the Expendable block. It could even be a job situation where you realize you aren't moving forward any longer, and you feel it's time to leave. Any time you spend on the job beyond the point of "it's time to go," is time spent in the Expendable block.

When we are living the "whirlwind life," our blocks are not stacked properly. We might have the Marginal block on the bottom, spending the bulk of our time here, and then the Expendable block on the second level. The Power block might be the topmost block, but your stack will be subject to topple over with the slightest push. And, there will be a push at some point.

Life is unscripted. Sooner or later, there will be urgent situations that are unplanned. It happens to us all at times. The kids get sick, or the car breaks down. If we don't have any margin at all in our lives, one small, unplanned situation might be the "straw that breaks the camel's back." Or, your own.

Spending more time in the Power and Restorative

blocks will cause your time in other blocks to diminish. How do we get more time to spend in the Power and Restorative blocks? We choose to spend less time in the Expendable and Incongruous blocks. We can't choose to spend less time in the Marginal block – at least, not directly. We must spend more time in the Power and Restorative block in order to gradually decrease our time required in the Marginal block.

Now that you know what to look for, it's time to identify where you are currently spending your time.

This is an important step in effective planning and goal setting. We must identify how we are currently using our time – which activities are an investment of time and which activities are wasting our time.

I don't expect you to only make a list of the activities you fill your calendar with. I want you to categorize your activities according to their importance in your life. Then, decide if you are where you want to be in each area of your life (physical, mental, spiritual, and relational).

You must determine where you are and where you want to be. The first step in doing this is to clearly, honestly, and thoughtfully evaluate where you are now.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT DO I VALUE?

“The values that form the basis for your True North are derived from your beliefs and convictions. In defining your values, you must decide what is most important in your life. Is it maintaining your integrity, making a difference, helping other people, or devoting yourself to family? There is no one right set of values. Only you can decide the question of your values.”

~Bill George

I always thought I knew what my priorities in life were, until something I read challenged me to consider a new perspective. (*Telling others my priorities is meaningless. What matters is how I live.*)

My priorities show up in my daily life. I don't have to tell people what is important to me. They can simply look at how I am living and see what my priorities are.

There are three ways to identify what is important to us.

1) What we spend time on:

We can spend time any way we want to, but we can only spend it once! It is the most precious thing we have. You can't turn back time, save time, buy time, or manage time, but you can *waste* time. We are all given the same 1,440 minutes in a day. How we choose to spend our time is entirely up to us. How we choose to spend our time will determine where we will be in the future and what we will be doing.

For example, I invest some of my time working out almost every day because I want to be healthy enough in two months, two years, or two decades to enjoy life. If I

believe my body is a temple, I need to take care of it. After all, it's the only one I'm ever going to have.

2) What we spend money on:

If someone took a look at my checkbook or bank card statement for the past month, they would know EXACTLY what is important to me: Books! Each month, I choose to spend discretionary funds on books I can read to develop myself. I invest my money in resources that will help me grow and develop in the direction I want to go. I spent more on books and personal growth last year than I did on clothes.

3) What we think and talk about:

James Allen said, *“A man's mind may be likened to a garden, which may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild; but whether cultivated or neglected, it must, and will, bring forth. If no useful seeds are put into it, then an abundance of useless weed seeds will fall therein, and will continue to produce their kind.”*

What we think about becomes reality because we talk about what we think about, and then, those words lead to our actions. It's important that we are thinking the right thoughts and talking about things that are meaningful to us. It's also important that we feed our minds right. I read somewhere that what you do the first ten minutes after you wake up will affect your entire day. So, I spend the first precious minutes of my day in prayer or reading scripture.

These three choices will reveal what is important in a person's life. You will see evidence of their priorities in

how they live. Sadly, our life doesn't always align with what we say is important or what we want to be important. There is usually a gap between what we want in our life and what we have in our life. So often, we are so busy for every single minute of our day that we don't accomplish the really *important* things. It's easy to spend all of your time and energy on activities that don't necessarily help you achieve the things you want to achieve.

Your goals should be aligned with your values.¹ When they are, they are fueled by passion and create quality of life once achieved. Our goals become motivating to us because they are inspiring us from within – intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic goals such as personal growth and significance in the life of someone else are much more satisfying overall when we reach them as opposed to the empty feeling that can come from achieving extrinsic goals such as wealth and fame.

Exercise 2: Values Based Living – Your Values

Imagine it's your 75th birthday. Your family is giving you a big birthday party and gathered all around you are family and friends. They are toasting to you and talking about how you have impacted their life. What are they saying? Which of your qualities are they talking about?

Will they say you lived with integrity? Will they say you valued time with your family? Will they say you spent all your time trying to make money?

What is most important to you? What gives you meaning?

Write down what you visualize them saying about you and why it is important to you:

In that scene, is what they are describing about you the same thing you WANT them to describe?

Take 60 seconds, and write down the first things that come to mind as values you personally embrace. *Examples: Family, Health, Happiness, Free Time, Travel, Wealth, Spiritual Fulfillment, Respect of Others, Peace of Mind, Friendships, Recognition.*

If you have a mission statement already, ask yourself if your mission statement reflects the values you just wrote down. If you don't have one, those values are a great

place to begin writing your mission statement. Ideally, it should reflect those values that are most important to you.

This process takes time and thought. Most people find their mission statement changes over time as they develop personally. Actually, creating an empowering mission statement requires a significant investment of time and energy. We must connect to our inner self, which requires introspection, time, and reflection.

Questions to consider when preparing to write your personal mission statement:

- If I had unlimited time and resources, what would I do?

- What has been the happiest times in my life, and why was I happy?

- What characteristics do I most admire in other people?

- What are the three most important things I want to accomplish?

- What are my most important roles in life? (Spouse, parent, etc.)

Exercise 3: Values Based Living – Your Mission

Brainstorm on the answers to the previous questions. Then, use your reflections to write a rough draft of your mission statement below. Mission Statements can be a sentence, a paragraph, a picture, or an entire page. Don't worry about perfection here – there is no right or wrong way to develop your personal mission statement – it's personal and should be as unique as you are.

Inevitably, something will occur unexpectedly, forcing you to make a decision. When that happens, use your personal mission statement as a guide to help you make a value based decision.

My Mission Statement:

CHAPTER FIVE
WHO AM I TODAY?

“I have different hats; I'm a mother, I'm a woman, I'm a human being, I'm an artist and hopefully I'm an advocate. All of those plates are things I spin all the time.”

~Annie Lennox

We all wear many different hats, and we have many roles as individuals. You might be an employee at work, but you are a mom, dad, or a spouse at home. You might wear a hat as a volunteer for the food bank. All too often, we see these hats completely independent of one another.

In reality, we should look at our lives as a whole. Each hat we wear is part of our interrelated, entire being. Gandhi said, *“Man cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied doing wrong in any other department. Life is one indivisible whole.”*

Some hats are bigger than others. Some hats must be worn more often. Some hats can be worn on top of other hats. Some hats are too big for us, and some are too small. Some hats are not meant for us and should be passed on to others.

If we haven't yet identified our mission, purpose, and vision of our life, then the hats we wear are probably defined in large part by others. Spending the time to really connect with your inner values and mission will help you identify the hats that are important to *you*. Your hats can then become the way to live out your vision and mission.

Once you determine the hats you will call yours, each of them is important and has its own unique place in your

life. You must identify which hats you will own. Then, determine which hat or hats you should be wearing at any given time.

This doesn't mean each hat gets equal time and attention every day or every week – life is full of seasons. At times, it is necessary to focus short term on one hat more than another to accomplish your overall mission. This is why you must look at your life from a “Big Picture” perspective.

If we choose too many hats for ourselves, it's important to realize we will be unable to spend enough time wearing each of them. For this reason, I suggest limiting the number of hats you own. Try to select four to six hats that you wear in your roles that relate to other people (work, volunteering, church, relationships, etc.) and remember to keep one hat that you wear just for you and your restoration.

We must have one hat we wear for restoration. It's much like filling up your emotional well-being tank with fuel, so you can keep going to help others. If you run on empty for too long, sooner or later you will run out of energy and have nothing left to give someone else. Each of us should make sure to spend some time wearing the Restorative block or personal restoration hat.

Hats don't have to be narrowly defined. I have one hat called “Speaker and Author” because I can bucket activities together for that hat. They are so similar that I count them as one. In contrast, I have one hat that just says “Wife,” because it's a high priority hat for me. Note: You can wear more than one hat at a time, but be careful not to do that too often or with too many hats.

Your hats may change over the course of your life, and their priority may also change. For me, each of my hats must serve my role as a Christian in some way too.

Here are some examples of my “hats.”

- 1) Personal Renewal Hat (Restorative block)
- 2) Wife
- 3) Speaker and Author
- 4) Coach and Trainer
- 5) Family Member (Sister, granddaughter, daughter-in-law, etc.) and Friend
- 6) Group Fitness Instructor

When I’m wearing hats perfectly aligned with the priorities in my life and with my values, I’m living in PRIME Time.

When an opportunity comes to me, I stop and evaluate it. Does it fit any of the hats I have now? If so, how? If not, should I consider taking on another hat? Remember, I have six hats already. My life is comfortably full with the hats I own now, and I’m able to dedicate enough time for each of them. Taking on a seventh hat would mean taking away some of my time and energy from another hat.

My different activities from day to day will be determined by which hat I am wearing.

For example, on Saturdays, I spend most of my time wearing my “Wife” hat. The majority of my time and attention will be spent on activities I can do while wearing this hat. On occasion, I will change hats, but it’s rare to do that because Saturday is the time my husband, Mack, and I set aside to spend together.

Today, I woke up and put on the “Speaker and Author” hat right away. I spent six hours wearing this hat, and I’ll change to my “Coach and Trainer” hat around lunch time. This afternoon, I’ll switch to my “Group

Fitness Instructor” hat. At any time, if the need arises to put on my “Wife” hat, I may need to take off one of the other hats.

Living in PRIME Time allows me to do this because I know fulfilling my role as a wife is a high priority and is right in the center of my values. It’s important to be able to define the hats I keep as a priority, so I can make decisions easily. This allows me to be flexible, yet still remain true to my values.

I must say I don’t always get this right. There are times when I need to reevaluate my hats and the time I spend wearing each of them. I’m not perfect, and you won’t be either. But, I’m better than I was even a few years ago, and I’m always working to get better.

Exercise 4: What Hats Do You Wear?

- 1) Personal Renewal Hat
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)

Now that you know what hats you wear, ask yourself if those are the hats you want to wear. There is no right or wrong answer. Only you can decide if you are wearing the right hats. If not, stop and decide what hats you want to wear based on the values you listed in chapter three. Also, make sure the hats you wear are in the right order.

Exercise 5: What Hats Should You Wear?

1) Personal Renewal Hat

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

Before you go any further, make sure you know what success looks like when wearing each of your hats. Can you define it? Do you know what it would look like to achieve it?

An example of this for me is how I define success in my role as Group Fitness Instructor. I set a determined amount of time I'm willing to dedicate to this role, and I can articulate what success looks like when wearing this hat.

I put on this hat when I walk into the gym, and I focus on it for one hour. I don't read email while I'm

wearing this hat and teaching class because that would be a distraction. I can't deliver a successful class if I'm reading emails instead of focusing on my participants. Success when wearing this hat means a fun, safe, and effective class for my participants. It requires focus, preparation, and even practice to wear this hat well.

Therefore, I limit the size of this hat. I would rather wear a smaller Group Fitness Instructor hat, and wear it well, rather than wear a large Group Fitness Instructor hat and have it fall off sometimes.

I recently had the opportunity to become a personal trainer. I evaluated it – would it fit my Group Fitness Instructor hat? No, it would require wearing another hat. Was it a hat I wanted to start wearing? No, my life is in good alignment, and I don't want to take time and energy away from some of my other hats. So, I declined the opportunity. I can say “no” to the good opportunities because I know doing so will allow me to say “yes” to the great opportunities.

Here is another example - Personal Renewal Hat: I will have time each day for exercise. I will get 7-8 hours of sleep on a regular basis. I will spend time each week in recreation outside. I will spend time each week in spiritual renewal and prayer.

Exercise 6: Define Overall Success for Your Roles or Hats

1) Personal Renewal Hat:

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

CHAPTER SIX

WHERE AM I GOING?

“What am I doing? Why am I doing it?”

~Andy Stanley

Now that you have an idea of what success in each area of your life would look like, it's time to set your long term and short term goals. With each goal you set, it's important to ask yourself: *Why am I doing this? What do I want to accomplish? How will I get there?*

We will talk more about carrying out the action steps in the next chapter. For now, focus on setting your goals and developing an action plan. Tony Robbins said, "*One reason so few of us achieve what we truly want is that we never direct our focus.*"

There was a famous scene in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where Alice asks the cat which road to take. The cat asks a question in response – "Where do you want to go?" Alice replies, "I don't know." The cat grins and points out, "Then, it doesn't matter which road you take."

All too often we are drifting around, just like Alice, without knowing for certain which direction we want to go.

If you don't really know where you are going, you are going to have a very difficult time getting there. Or, perhaps you are already there. But, not knowing which direction you want to travel will leave you stuck without

any forward momentum.

Long term goals can be one, five, or more years away. Short term goals are small goals that are milestones on your way to long term goals.

Choose just one of your hats to start with, so you can focus on one specific area first. Once you have identified the related long and short term goals and created/implemented your action plan for that area of your life, you can select a second hat to focus on. Slowly add the other “hats” in over the next several weeks or months until you have them all. Don’t try to do everything at once, or you will find yourself unable to be successful. There are no shortcuts to this process. Pat Parelli said, *“Take the time it takes, so it takes less time.”*

Statistics show you are up to 300% more likely to be successful when you are very specific about your goals. It’s also important to write down your goals and action items. If you can’t define it well enough to write it down, then stop and clarify the goal until you can. Don’t move on until you have done this.

Example: By (insert date), I will have accomplished (insert goal).

It’s important to set small, achievable goals when starting out. I once read that only 20% of professionals have clearly defined goals, and only 4% have them written down. Write down your goals and be SMART. SMART goals¹ are the key to success and keeping your commitments.

Specific – Be very detailed and clearly outline what you want. “Earn \$100,000 from January to December 2015” is specific, while “Get rich” is not. It’s very important that

we have a clearly defined picture of exactly what it is we want.

Measurable – Quantify your goal in a way that you can measure it. “Lose 5 pounds” is measurable while “Get skinny” is not. How will you know when you have reached your goal if you can’t measure it? How will you know you are making progress toward the goal? How will you track your progress? No one wants to play the game if there is no scoreboard and no way to win.

Attainable – Let’s face it; we all have things we would love to do, be, or have. Setting realistic goals gives us a much better chance of attaining those. It’s like the saying goes; you eat an elephant one bite at a time. Set smaller goals that are attainable to create momentum. Success will cause you to set and reach additional goals.

Relevant – Your goals should be relevant to your overall vision and mission. They need to be important goals that help you become the person you want to be. This is important because it will take time, effort, and energy to work on reaching these goals – make sure you are setting truly important goals in the big picture of who and what you want to become.

Time bound – In *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling talk about “X to Y by when.” The first four steps in “SMART goals” reveal the “X to Y.” However, without “by when,” you won’t feel a sense of urgency to accomplish the goal. As an example, when we sign up for a 5K, we actually get motivated to start training – because now there is a deadline associated with the goal.

Consider the difference in these two commitments:

“My cholesterol scores were high, so I want to work on eating better and losing a little weight next year because my doctor said I need to be healthier.”

“My vision for my life in 2016 and beyond includes eating healthy and staying fit because that will help me have more energy and a better quality of life. I will lose 5 pounds from January to March 2016 and follow a healthy diet 95% of the time this year. I will also exercise 30 minutes per day three times a week.”

The first example isn't really specific. It's difficult to measure success and progress. There's not a personally relevant reason to work on the goal. There isn't a timeframe. It's also not likely to be very effective.

The second example has a compelling reason to work toward the goal. It's specific in terms of what and by when and has an achievable timeframe. The person that makes the second commitment will be 300% more likely to accomplish his/her goal next year. Those are the odds I want!

One thing that can be valuable is a “deserves consideration” list. Sometimes we hear a good idea, maybe at a conference, and it sounds good. But, we aren't ready to commit to it yet and don't want to make a withdrawal by committing to do it and not following through.

A “deserves consideration list” is a list of ideas that have potential, may move us in the right direction, and warrant further thought before we decide to follow through on it or discard it. This could be a page in your planner or a “note” in your iPhone. Either way, it's good

to store the thoughts that you want to revisit and possibly implement.

Exercise 7: Define 1-3 Long or Short Term Goals for One of Your Hats. Be Very Specific.

Hat: _____

Long/Short Term Goal #1:

Long/Short Term Goal #2:

Long/Short Term Goal #3:

Note: Additional exercise worksheets for your other hats can be found on the following pages

ADDITIONAL WORKSHEETS

Define 1-3 Long or Short Term Goals for One of Your Hats. Be Very Specific.

Hat: _____

Long/Short Term Goal #1:

Long/Short Term Goal #2:

Long/Short Term Goal #3:

ADDITIONAL WORKSHEETS

Define 1-3 Long or Short Term Goals for One of Your Hats. Be Very Specific.

Hat: _____

Long/Short Term Goal #1:

Long/Short Term Goal #2:

Long/Short Term Goal #3:

ADDITIONAL WORKSHEETS

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Hat: _____

Long/Short Term Goal #1:

Long/Short Term Goal #2:

Long/Short Term Goal #3:

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Hat: _____

Long/Short Term Goal #1:

Long/Short Term Goal #2:

Long/Short Term Goal #3:

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Define 1-3 Long or Short Term Goals for One of Your Hats. Be Very Specific.

Hat: _____

Long/Short Term Goal #1:

Long/Short Term Goal #2:

Long/Short Term Goal #3:

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Hat: _____

Long/Short Term Goal #1:

Long/Short Term Goal #2:

Long/Short Term Goal #3:

ADDITIONAL WORKSHEETS

Define 1-3 Long or Short Term Goals for One of Your Hats. Be Very Specific.

Hat: _____

Long/Short Term Goal #1:

Long/Short Term Goal #2:

Long/Short Term Goal #3:

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW WILL I GET THERE?

“A goal is simply a dream with a deadline.”
~Michael Hyatt

You should have listed long or short-term goals for each area of your life and/or each hat you wear. Now, it's time to set weekly action items that are specific and achievable.

Why weekly? It's a natural step for us to view a week at a time because our calendar is set up that way. It accounts for a workweek and also weekend, a cycle that fits the way we typically live life. It's also enough time to allow you flexibility without getting bogged down in planning every minute. It's very important to remember not to schedule every single minute of your day – remember, this is not about blocking every single minute or hour to a dedicated activity, but rather scheduling our priorities first.

This is where we translate the bigger, long-term or short-term goals into action steps. We do not have to set a specific action item for each hat every week. Some hats will have more focus or more priority while some hats will have less. There is a natural rhythm where different roles rise to a larger place in your life and then drift to a smaller place in your life, much like the ocean tide coming in and going out.

Think about the size of the hat you wear when you

have small children. You spend a large percentage of your time wearing the parent hat because they require more from you. Once your children become adults or are away at college, the parent hat becomes much smaller.

Some hats will always be central to your life and won't ever decrease beyond a minimal amount, unless you decide to take that hat off for good. (For example, if you are an entrepreneur, you will probably always be somewhat involved in your business, even if you eventually hire others to do most of the work. If you decide to sell your business or close it, then you will take that hat off.)

Organizing around our different hats allows us to see the full context of life. Then, we can prioritize what we have organized. This will allow us to use our time effectively based on our values and the zones which are most important.

As you prepare for your week ahead, you should identify the best time to sit down and organize. For some, this might be Monday morning before work. For others, Monday mornings are busy and hectic, so planning on Sunday night may be a better option. Or, you may prefer to sit down midweek to organize instead. *When* you do it is not that important. *Doing it* is what matters most. This is when you look forward, set your goals, and determine your action steps for the week.

Pack the Big Blocks First

With your planner or calendar in front of you, stop for a moment to visualize this exercise. Imagine you have a large box in front of you that represents all 168 hours in the week ahead. The box has a lid that fits on top, and the

lid must fit properly – nothing can spill out over the edges or overflow the top. Every single thing you need and want to do this week must fit into the box. Big blocks for the important activities from the Power block (working in your strengths at work, creating, writing, etc.) and the Restorative block (exercise or time with the kids) and small blocks for the Marginal, Incongruous, or Expendable block activities must all fit. You will only have time for what you can fit into the box.

Think about how we tend to plan our week. Typically, we start to throw in the easy things first, because they are easy. “Well, I know I need to make sure to pick up dinner on Wednesday night, so I can watch (insert your favorite TV show). So, you write down “Pick up takeout” on Wednesday afternoon’s slot, followed by “favorite TV show” on Wednesday night.

Or, you jot down the monthly running club meeting for Monday night. You’ve been a member for years. You NEVER miss the meeting, even though the agenda rarely changes, and the same old marathon stories get swapped around. You really don’t even run much anymore, but the pizza is good at the meeting.

Or, there is that Pampered Chef party you were invited to for Thursday night. You don’t really know the hostess - one of your friends begged you to go with her, so you agreed, not wanting to tell her no.

After the *easy* things go on the list, we usually add the things we *must* do next. Work, pick up the children from school, grocery shopping, pay the bills, etc.

After the easy things and the “must do” things are put in the box, there isn’t much room left for anything else. The box is full, and you close the lid on it with a sigh. Who has room for the gym? “Maybe it’ll fit next week,” you propose to yourself.

Notice what happened – you put the small “blocks” Marginal, Incongruous, and Expendable zone activities in first. Then, somehow, the box was full. There wasn’t much time for Power block activities and even less for the Restorative block activities.

Instead of adding the small blocks first, start with the big blocks, the most important activities. If you are your most productive at work between 8am – 10am, then schedule yourself to be at your desk during those hours. That’s your PRIME Time, where you are working in the zone. The last thing you need is a routine staff meeting interfering because your calendar showed you were available when your secretary needed to schedule it.

Once you have put the big, important blocks in the box, the little ones will fill in the open spaces easily. Remember, when you put the big blocks in first, the smaller ones will fit in around the big blocks with little or no effort.

Often, we can fulfill two goals at the same time if we are abundant minded and are looking for opportunities. For example, if you have a goal to exercise this week and a goal to spend time with your spouse, why not combine the two and take a walk together? When we realize the *Power of EFFECTIVE Planning*, we can accomplish much more of what truly matters, instead of focusing on simply checking off our to-do list.

Learn to Say “No”

If spending time with the children is a core value for you, schedule it into your week first. Pampered Chef party or quality time with the children? Only you can decide which activity is most important.

You may very well have some activities this week, or next, that aren't in alignment with your core values, the hats you want to wear, and the long or short term goals you have set for yourself. That's ok. Getting to where you are in PRIME Time all of the time may take some time. As you become more aligned, it will be easier to evaluate opportunities as they come up.

Honor those commitments you have already made – but start to become very selective about the commitments you make in the future. I very rarely say “yes” to anything on the spot anymore. I ask to get back with the person by the next day if possible. That way, I can consider the commitment carefully without feeling pressured, and it's much easier to say no with a gracious smile when I remember what else I could be doing with that time instead.

We are all familiar with the concept of budgeting our money. Yet we often fail to budget our time. And then, we wonder why it seems to have evaporated.

Budget very carefully for the week by identifying the one or two most important things to accomplish THIS WEEK for the hat you are most focused on wearing. There are probably several goals you might feel you need to accomplish for each role – but focus on the one or two that are most important.

Ask yourself: What is the most important action I can take this week while wearing this hat? What's the number one priority that, if it doesn't get done, nothing else matters?

Write those most important things on your worksheet or planner. Sometimes, you may select a specific time and day in the week. Other times, you may want to dedicate a “Time Zone” in which to complete the activity.

Prepare for the Detours

One day, I stopped at the dry cleaners to pick up a suit. It wasn't at the store yet but was scheduled to be delivered in 20 minutes. The clerk explained this and asked me to please wait. Rather than wait for 20 minutes there at the store, I agreed to simply come back in an hour after running another errand. This way, I spent my 20 minutes completing another errand, rather than wasting it waiting. You can take advantage of every small block of time if you have prepared for it because you're able to be more flexible.

When I'm making a list of errands I need to complete, I write them down in the order that's most efficient. That way, I don't spend extra time driving back and forth in traffic. Also, when something has to change, like the dry cleaners, I can quickly scan what's next and see if I can switch something around easily. It doesn't always work, but many times you can take advantage of those opportunities to maximize your time.

I always try to schedule my doctor appointments for early in the day or right after lunch for this reason. Doctor's offices are known for being behind later in the day – so I ask for an early morning appointment or right after lunch. That way, I'm less likely to have to wait because the doctor isn't behind schedule.

And, I always come prepared with something I can do while I wait to make the best use of my time.

You can do this if you plan effectively. For example, about once a week, I like to check in with my close family members. A quick text to say hello or a phone conversation to catch up, but I have a group of family members with whom I am intentional about reaching out

to regularly. As I look at my week ahead, I make sure I'm including that in my planning because that "hat" is very important to me. So, when I am waiting for my oil change, I can quickly scan my list and see who I can connect with.

As we live through each day, there will be opportunities and challenges with unexpected situations or events. That's why it's important to spend our time planning effectively and working on goals that are value based in order to minimize the urgent and unexpected situations.

Stay in Bounds

One thing you may have realized is that a task will expand to the available time allowed. That's why deadlines work so well – we will often procrastinate or drag out a task if there is more time available.

Have you ever planned a vacation and regardless of the pile on your desk, you manage to put superhuman effort into work that last Friday before vacation and everything that must get done, somehow does get done.

Grocery shopping always takes me longer if I don't have any appointments scheduled afterward. If I have prepared by planning meals for the week, 45 minutes is usually plenty of time to grocery shop.

But, if I don't have anything else scheduled immediately afterward, I tend to spend longer in the grocery store, maybe as much as 15 extra minutes. Realizing this, I set myself a "time budget" for grocery shopping and that helps me stay on track. The secret to this is having my meals planned in advance, so I know exactly what I need to buy.

Once you have given yourself a time zone in which to accomplish something, make sure you honor it as well as you can. You can't always schedule people – so make sure you are considering them.

If phone calls to grandma usually take 30 minutes or more, don't pick up the phone to call her when you only have 10 minutes before you need to walk in to your lunch meeting.

I'm always very clear when I set meetings with clients. I offer a time slot "I'm free Friday from 11 until 1, so we can meet at 11. Or, if you think we will need longer than two hours, I'm available on Monday instead."

Stay within bounds as much as possible. If you realize that a meeting is going to take longer than planned, you must make a decision in the moment. In order to honor your next commitment, you must ask to conclude or ask to finish at another time. If it's very important or a very sensitive meeting, you may decide that it needs to take priority. Perhaps the "hat" you are wearing is bigger than the "hat" related to your next meeting. If that's the case, pause the meeting and ask if you can be excused briefly to let the other party know you won't be able to make it and will need to reschedule.

More often than not, by keeping track of the time in the meeting or appointment, it's possible to conclude the business and wrap up before the end of the allotted time. Simply maintaining an awareness of the time will help you use it more effectively.

Review and Reflect

Your regular planning session is also a good time to reflect on last week or last month. What did you spend

time on last week that you wish had been invested elsewhere? Were there blocks of time that were unexpected time wasters? Could you have done anything to take advantage of that time or scheduled the appointment for a different time?

If the answer is yes, make a note of it, so you can avoid repeating the mistake in the future.

Exercise 8: Pack the Big Blocks First

Use the blank weekly planner on the next page to practice putting your highest priorities into your schedule first. You may want to use different colored pens to represent each of your different hats. List the one or two most important activities for your biggest or most important hats. Remember, *it's not about prioritizing your schedule but rather scheduling your priorities.*

Saturday				
Friday				
Thursday				
Wednesday				
Tuesday				
Monday				
Sunday				

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONSISTENT EXECUTION

“In essence, if we want to direct our lives, we must take control of our consistent actions. It's not what we do once in a while that shapes our lives, but what we do consistently.”

~Tony Robbins

John C. Maxwell said, “*The secret of success is determined by your daily agenda.*”

Planning effectively also allows you to create a bigger buffer for yourself when things don’t go as planned. But even the best plan in the world isn’t any good if we can’t execute it daily. Your life won’t change – unless you change what you are doing each and every day. There won’t be an overnight transformation once you decide to make some changes. You first must make the decision to make the changes, and then, you must implement the changes every day. Then, and only then, will you start to see some improvement in your daily life. The decision comes first, then you must have the discipline to carry it out.

Discipline is one of those strengths we can build upon. We aren’t born with a high level of self-discipline, although some people may naturally have more than others. But, discipline is something we can develop over time.

Discipline is really the ability to delay gratification. If we’ve decided we want to be healthy, we know we need to eat well and exercise. But, exercise isn’t really pleasant. If we don’t exercise, we avoid the unpleasantness and

discomfort.

However, we also won't reap the benefits of a healthy life. If we are able to delay gratification and follow through on our plans to exercise, we feel some unpleasantness for 30 minutes or an hour, but we feel really great the rest of the day. First, we feel good because we know we are building healthy habits into our life. Second, we feel good because we worked our "mind muscle" and demonstrated self-discipline. That is, we gave ourselves a command and followed through with it. The more times you do it, the easier it will be to do the same again in the future. Each time we are successful, it will make us stronger mentally. That's why J. J. Watt said, "*Success isn't owned. It's leased. And, rent is due every day.*"

To ensure you are executing consistently:

Make Small Commitments to Start With

I've already mentioned the importance of starting with small changes because it will help us be successful. Consistent, small changes will create huge changes when compounded over time. The problem is those small changes don't feel significant. So, we underestimate their importance. Small, everyday decisions don't feel like they are high stakes decisions.

"I'll just skip the gym tonight because I'm tired. Missing one night won't hurt." And, it won't. If it's just one workout, it's not a deal-breaker. But, allowing yourself to skip one will make it easier to skip the next one and the next one. Soon, you'll be paying \$29.99 a month for a gym membership you never use.

Honor Your Values

At one of my planning workshops, one of the attendees realized the games on her iPhone weren't in alignment with her values. She had some big goals for her life, but she was wasting countless hours playing pointless games because they were easy, fun, and a way to escape.

However, during the workshop, she realized that playing games wasn't in alignment with what she truly wanted to accomplish over the next year. She wanted to write a book, get healthy, and renew her relationship with her spouse. None of that was going to happen accidentally and certainly not if she continued to spend hours and hours each week playing Candy Crush. She deleted the games off her phone on the spot.

Following up with her a few weeks later, I asked her how it was going. "I have so much more time!" She enthusiastically replied. Suddenly, everything she wanted to do was possible. She was excited to share, "I've decided not to download any more games at all on my phone. It's too easy to play if they are on there, and that's not what I really value."

There are many opportunities each day to make decisions on how we spend our precious time and energy. Make the decisions that honor the values you have set for yourself.

Don't Back Down

Stand firm once you have made a decision. If it was worth deciding to do, it's worth doing. The greatest gap in the world is the gap between what we know we want to

do or should do and what we actually do.

Learning to say no to the priorities of others is one of the biggest areas where you will feel external pressure to back down. Stand firm. It may not be pleasant – we don't want to feel like we are letting others down or tell someone no. But, *we cannot say yes to everything*. If we don't carefully consider what we are saying yes to, something or someone else will choose for us. The more this happens, the more you live in the “whirlwind” because your activities and energies will not be in alignment with your values.

The biggest area where you may feel internal pressure is the commitments you make to yourself. Once you have made a commitment to yourself on what you will and won't do, make sure you honor it just as much as you honor commitments to others. It may be tempting to cave in under pressure – resist!

Exercise 9: Journaling

Spend some time in thought and reflection on these questions.

- 1) What commitments do I have in my life right now that aren't in alignment with my values? (Remember, it's important to fulfill them. But also remember, you should not make them again.)
- 2) What activities am I regularly spending time on that aren't in alignment with my values?

CHAPTER NINE
STAY ON COURSE

“Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.”

~Peter Drucker

Joseph Conrad said, “*Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions.*” Or, to put it another way, we can’t be thinking deeply if we are constantly focused on activity.

Actions in themselves aren’t bad – indeed, we must take action in order to move forward in life. But, activity doesn’t always equal results. Sometimes, we are simply busy, without actually taking action. It’s very easy to be constantly busy without stopping to take time for reflection, listening, thinking, and even prayer.

I know the feeling all too well. As an entrepreneur, I ALWAYS have a running list of tasks, projects, and ideas. And, I love having a list, so I can cross it off. But, if I’m always busy and activity is the enemy of thinking, listening, and tapping into that guidance, I run the risk of being busy without accomplishing anything or accomplishing the wrong things which is just as bad.

At the end of the week – remember to reserve some time to reflect and see how the week went. What worked or what didn’t work? What can you do better next week? What goals were achieved? What goals need to be carried forward? Are you setting goals that are challenging but achievable? Is there a pattern around what prevents you

from achieving goals regularly?

Evaluation is the step that closes the loop, much like the well-known PDCA model¹ (Plan, Do, Check, Adjust). Evaluation helps accelerate improvements. Reflection is important because that's where we turn life's lessons and our failures into successes.

Inevitably, there will be times when we stray off the course we have set. It requires courage and self-discipline to live a value-centered life. When we embrace the concept that we can choose our response in any situation, we then must also embrace that we are responsible.

It's something nearly all of us fight at some point in our lives. The crush, the rush, the bustle, and the busy. The never-ending pressure to do more, be more, and have more. In our fast paced society today, there are limitless opportunities to fill our life and use our time. Some of the activities have meaning and value and some don't. Each of us must decide for ourselves how to use our time. If we don't decide, someone or something else will.

When someone or something else decides how you are using your time, it's almost certainly not going to be in alignment with your core values or in your best interest.

Don't be afraid to make course corrections. I once read that an airplane is off course 95% of the time. Airplanes almost always arrive exactly when and where they should. That's because the pilot or autopilot is constantly making tiny course adjustments. Make the adjustments early and often, so they won't be too dramatic or require too much effort. If you wait until it's too late or your adjustments are few and far between, they will feel drastic and difficult.

Exercise 10: Journaling

Spend some time in thought and reflection on these questions and their answers.

- 1) What worked well this week?
- 2) What didn't work well this week?
- 3) What needs to change?

An abundant life is available to us all. It's ours to claim and live. But, we must claim it as it certainly won't happen accidentally.

As with any tool, the concepts and principles in this book will only be helpful when used and applied. If you read the book without stopping to complete the exercises, you should reconsider now. Stop and go through the exercises if you truly want to take control of your life. Otherwise, you will be controlled by your life.

Remember, the greatest gap in life is the one between knowing and doing. If you know what you should do but don't do it, no one else can do it for you. If you don't know what you should do, then the exercises in this book will help you tremendously.

CHAPTER TEN
REFERENCES, NOTES &
FURTHER READING

References & Notes:

Chapter Four:

1) Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill
First Things First (Simon & Schuster, 1994)

Chapter Six:

1) The mnemonic acronym SMART is generally attributed to Peter Drucker and his management by objectives concept.

2) Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, Jim Huling, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* (Free Press, 2012)

Chapter Nine:

1) PDCA is also known as the Deming Cycle.

Further Reading:

CrazyBusy, Edward M. Hallowell, MD

First Things First, Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill,
Rebecca R. Merrill

How Will You Measure Your Life?, Clayton M. Christensen

Margin, Richard A Swenson, M.D.

Today Matters, John C. Maxwell

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ria is a motivational speaker, author, and professional coach with a passion to help others make the right choices today to reach their goals tomorrow. She triumphed over being sexually abused from age 12 – 19 by her father and escaped by leaving home at 19 without a job, car, or even a high school diploma.

Ria successfully applied leadership principles throughout her career in the healthcare industry, learning to lead at all levels with increasing responsibilities, before resigning from corporate life to pursue her passion for coaching, motivational speaking, and leadership development. Ria holds degrees in Office Administration, Human Resource Management, and a Master's Degree in Business Administration. She is a certified leadership coach, speaker and trainer with The John Maxwell Team.

Ria is also a fierce health and wellness advocate. She is a certified fitness instructor, teaches group fitness classes several times a week, runs marathons and is an avid mountain biker – winning the 2011 and 2012 State Mountain Biking Championships in both Alabama and Georgia.

Ria lives near Atlanta, Georgia with her husband, Mack Story.

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