

Schedule is not a Four-Letter Word

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If you have a job, you are probably pretty familiar with keeping a schedule. When you hear the word schedule, does it make you cringe? Does it maybe even give you nightmares? I certainly hope not, but in case schedules are not your friend, I will do my best to put a different spin on the word and the concept.

One of the top suggestions I make to my clients once they have come up with a goal for their life is to put the action steps (tasks) associated with that goal on a schedule, that is, on a calendaring system. A calendaring system can be a software program such as Microsoft Outlook, which is the system I use since it came with my computer, or a paper calendar and/or planner.

Before I became a life coach, I had a number of positions as a project coordinator and administrative assistant. In those positions I was not only responsible for my own schedule but also for the schedules of others. I used such planning methods as a Franklin Covey hard-copy time management system, Microsoft Project (a software program), huge wall calendars, you name it. Those are all good systems — as long as a person actually uses them.

I currently use Microsoft Outlook, as I mentioned. This software program not only has a calendaring system but you can also keep task lists. Both calendars and task lists come with reminders that notify you through your computer. This system really helps to keep me on track with appointments and tasks concerning my business, including writing this newsletter article.

I do not just use my calendaring system for business related appointments and tasks, however. I use my system for a myriad of activities and action steps in my life. Here are some of them:

- ♥ Exercise/walks/bicycle rides
- ♥ Doctor's and other appointments
- ♥ Bible Study
- ♥ Daily training/education (I'm currently going through a training on "Hope Coaching")
- ♥ Volunteer work
- ♥ Fun weekend activities with my husband
- ♥ Yard work
- ♥ Meals (otherwise I sometimes find I'm working through a meal, which is not healthy)
- ♥ Paperwork/paying bills
- ♥ "Cat Time" (my time to curl up with a good book in the sun)
- ♥ Monthly reminders to pay my online bills
- ♥ Birthdays
- ♥ Housework
- ♥ Reminders to call family members and/or friends
- ♥ Vacation activities

As you can see, there's some fun stuff on there as well as what one might consider "chores." I don't have kids, but if I did have them, their activities would be on my calendar as well.

Keeping a schedule/calendar may sound like too much work to you but, believe me, it saves me a lot of work because I don't miss important things in my life. When I say "important," I'm including time spent with loved ones, rest, and taking a few minutes to eat a meal. Often those types of activities get missed because we don't make them a priority, and yet I believe they're essential for our own health and the health of our relationships. They also help us to have a more well-balanced life.

Here are some recommendations for setting up a calendaring system of your own to ensure your personal life is well balanced:

- ♥ Select a scheduling/calendaring system, whether it's computer based, on your cell phone, on paper, or a combination of all of them. The nice thing about using a computer-based system such as Outlook is that when a reminder pops up on your computer about a task, and it no longer works out with your schedule, you can very easily reschedule it. If you are dismissing or deleting the task, you are making a conscious decision to do so. I would recommend that you not get into the habit of too hastily dismissing them.
- ♥ There are good paper-based time management systems out there as well. I've already mentioned the Franklin Covey system as being a good system. You can buy their various planning tools online (<http://www.franklincovey.com>) or at an office supply store. There are many other time management systems available as well.
- ♥ I also came across a website with a bunch of planner templates designed by individuals that you can modify on your computer and/or print. Here's a link to that website:
http://www.diyplanner.com/templates/directory?filter0=**ALL**&filter1=18
- ♥ I also use a small planner that I carry in my purse with my doctors' appointments, other appointments, vacation, birthdays, etc. noted on it for those times when I don't have my laptop computer with me. I currently don't have a sophisticated enough cell phone that has a good calendaring system on it, but if I did, I would use it as well. My husband's Blackberry is not only his cell phone but it is linked to the Outlook calendaring system on his computer. It's a wonderful system, and he loves it.
- ♥ Once you have selected your scheduling/planning/calendaring system (whatever you want to call it), put as many of the following as you want on your system, whether as calendar and/or task list items:
 - Individual action steps/tasks to get you closer to achieving a goal
 - Appointments
 - Meal breaks
 - Exercise/walks/fun activities
 - Training/education/self-improvement

- Rest breaks to pray, meditate, and/or read a good book
 - Phone calls or dates with loved ones
 - Volunteer activities
 - Vacations
 - Birthdays and other important dates
 - Housework, yard work, paperwork
- ♥ I would highly recommend that you set up reminder notifications if you are using an electronic system so you don't miss any of your action steps, activities, and appointments. As I mentioned before, I wouldn't recommend you haphazardly dismiss anything on your calendar before giving it some thought. The same goes for postponing anything on your calendar. Be present, and pay attention to what you are doing.

Planning out your life isn't a bad thing. It can help you to stay on top of things and to be mindful of how you are spending your time. It can also remind you to take care of yourself and to spend quality time with others. That doesn't mean that you can't be spontaneous in your life. Sometimes it's good to throw your schedule out the window, so to speak, for the hour, afternoon or day. Things happen that throw our schedules off. Also, opportunities come up in life that are too good to pass up. It's not wise to hold onto your schedule so tightly that you can't be flexible.

My recommendation to you is that you aim to keep a schedule that works for you but that you don't feel guilty when you do not or are not able to stick with it. It is meant to help you and not hurt you. One way to look at it is as a tool to assist you and not as a taskmaster.

I can speak from my own experience that having a calendaring system has relieved a lot of pressure from me to try to remember everything that needs to get done in my life or that I want to include in my life. I don't know about you, but personally I don't want to have to rely on my memory. As I get older, it's tougher for me to stay on top of everything. If there's a tool out there that can help me and my clients, I will use it and recommend it to others.

Your time is valuable. Take good care of your time ... and of yourself for your sake and for the sake of others in your life. It may actually give you peace of mind.