

How To Master Time In Only Ninety Seconds – You'll Be Amazed At This Simple Secret, and Yet It Took An Expert Seven Years To Find!

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If Only There Were 3 More Hours In The Day!

I wonder if you are anything like I was, some years ago - desperate to find those extra hours, and improve your quality of life.

Back then I was a burnt-out real estate agent. The money was excellent, but every time I got really humming with seriously productive activity - bang, I'd come to a juddering stop with exhaustion and sickness. It became a constant frustration, and I was seriously seeking answers. I was tired of never being able to achieve all the things I believed were possible, to reach my dreams and goals.

Do You Ever Ask Yourself 'How Can I Find More Time?'

Does some of this sound familiar?

Do you ever find yourself going home at the end of the day saying any of the following?:

- I'm sick of interruptions
- There's just not enough hours in the day.
- I'm bogged down with so much immediate work I can never get to the long-term projects that will make a difference
- I can't delegate – I don't have time to teach anyone else
- If that pile of paper on my desk gets any bigger it'll become a fire hazard!
- I hope no-one sees how much mail there is in my Inbox
- I'm stressed, overworked, tired....

And the list goes on....

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Or:

- Do your family and friends mutter about your long hours?
- Your loved ones complain they never see you?
- It takes you a minute or two to remember when you last had a weekend off?
- The last holiday seems like a distant dream?

The Glad News Is - There Are Simple Solutions

To my utter surprise, my intense search for answers, over some years, turned me from a burnt-out real estate agent and mother of six into an international time management specialist and author of a number of best-selling books. And I *promise* you – I'd started way behind the pack!

It was a few years into the training side of my time management business before I realized that all most people want, in anything but their areas of core responsibility, is just enough information to get by with. This applied even in something as fundamental as the quality of their life and the way they use their time. And there are many time management programs around that make it all too complicated.

Let me ask you - if you've ever been on some kind of diary-based time management course, are you still taking ten or twenty minutes at the beginning of each day to work out your A's, B's and C's, with each alpha category numbered 1 through to ... (however many items in each category)?

You'll be in the huge majority if you answer 'No'. What my clients taught me was that that process, no matter how good, is too complex. People are so busy doing their core work, as they strive to earn a living, that unnecessary complexity is a nuisance and a time waster.

The Quality of The Question Determines The Quality of The Answer

So, with that great learning, I'd already started, with great success, to simplify my teaching methods. But it got better. A fabulous question from a 20 year old one sunny morning, and my ninety second answer, changed the way I explain my topic – forever.

I was crossing the beautiful Sydney Harbor in Australia with my son James and his mate Richard. The boys had just finished university, and we were off to Manly Beach for a day of sun, surf, and (for the boys) admiration of beautiful scantily-clad women! (And if you've ever been to the Sydney beaches, you'll know what I mean!)

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Richard was asking about my work. He leaned forward with interest when I began to explain what I taught.

'Robyn, I constantly struggle with time. What's the guts of it?'

What a great question!

I'd never thought of it like that, but with such a brilliant question, the answer just popped out, and it's become an integral part of my teachings ever since.

I found myself saying, 'There are only four elements.'

1. The Big Picture;
2. Planning & Prioritising, and that expands to four sub-sections; -
 - a. Don't get bogged down in the urgent at the expense of the important
 - b. Develop a proactive focus
 - c. Plan weekly, at the beginning of the week
 - d. Every day work your 1-5 daily plan;
3. Tips and Techniques, and
4. Sanity Gaps.

'If you haven't got all four areas covered, you'll never get a good handle on your own time choices.

'The *big picture* gives you your goals, and where you should spend time. It helps you make the *right* choices, especially when faced with alternatives.

'Good planning and prioritising helps you use your time *effectively*, and if you've got it linked to your big picture you'll find it reasonably easy to work your choices into your schedule.

'On their own, however, the *big picture* and *planning and prioritising* are still not enough. We all know people brilliant at strategy, great at planning, and yet they dawdle through life. You also need *efficiency* - to know the fast track techniques, the short cuts, the quick ways to save time.

Short cuts don't constitute good time management, no matter how useful they are; it's too easy to efficiently rush around doing the wrong things. But combine shortcuts with the first two and you're getting close.

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'However, great strategy, great prioritising, and great techniques still don't make for good time management. It's just a recipe for a very full diary. You'll run around like a headless chook, in ever-diminishing circles, until you fall over. Fill every waking moment, and you'll just burn out.

'We also need *sanity gaps*. Here you've got time out, 'recharge and refresh' time, a chance to smell the roses and *live*.'

'Wow', said Richard. 'That's easy!'

I looked at him, and said, in some surprise, as I realised how simply I'd chunked it out: 'Yes, it is!'

Now, since you're not on a testosterone-filled young man on a ferry, heading off to sun and gorgeous bodies, let's take another five minutes of our time to expand a little.

1. The Big Picture

What really matters to you in your life? If you don't know that, if you don't have clear goals, a vision for where you want your life to go, how can you possibly be sure you've made the right choices when multiple possibilities press?

Every day pressing matters and multiple choices of action come at us. If you have a clear vision of your future life, if you know exactly what goals you're holding close to your heart, you have far greater power to say 'no' or 'sorry' and to prioritise effectively. Always remember, 'No' is one of the most powerful time management tools we have.

Without that clear vision, we'll be like a rudderless boat, pushed and pulled by the winds of fate. Yes, we'll still quite likely have a nice life, but what could we have achieved, what could we have become, what amazing experiences could we have lived, if we'd taken time to set some clear impelling goals for our life?

In my days of solo parenthood, living in the Far North of New Zealand and surviving on government assistance, I knew none of this. I was that rudderless boat. Once I learnt about goal-setting, life changed dramatically (and that's another story). Ask your friends about their goal-setting experiences; anyone who's ever done serious work on their goal-setting will have similar stories.

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If you've not yet got your goals anchored, make time next weekend to sit quietly, think at least a year out, and write down in very specific language, with as much detail as possible, clear goals in the following four areas:

- Self and wellbeing
- Business and career
- Home and family
- Community and humanity

Listen to your intuition. Ask yourself: 'What lights me up?' Those answers are signposts to the dreams of your soul.

If you'd like to make this really easy, check out a tool I co-authored with two friends. It helps you not so much with *how* to set goals, but with this big issue of *what* you want – [‘Getting a Grip on Life – Goals Toolkit’](#)

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

--- Mark Twain

2. Planning & Prioritising

Here is an expansion of the four sub-sets listed above:

a. Don't get bogged down in the urgent at the expense of the important

General Eisenhower is reported as saying, during the Second World War, that very few urgent things were ever important, and conversely, very few important things were ever urgent.

Ask yourself, 'How much of my life is consumed with urgencies?'

And then, 'What do I need to do to shift that focus?'

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b. Develop a proactive focus

As we develop a proactive focus, our tendency to be addicted to urgency reduces.

My definition of 'proactive' is '*anything that will make a long-term difference in my life*'.

It could include training, development of new products, improving your customer base, prospecting, delegation, time out by yourself, quality time with loved ones, sport and health, and the list goes on.

Most proactive activities, linking back to General Eisenhower's definition, are of low urgency and long-term importance. The problem is, unless we deliberately focus on them, they sit quietly in the wings and are easy to overlook. They don't usually shout and yell at us. They're opportunities that will quietly slip away unnoticed, as we race frenetically around doing our 'busy' work.

Try this for a useful phrase I crafted: 'In order to go faster, first you must go slower.'

In my first book, '[Getting a Grip on Time](#)', and the new DVD of a live seminar I ran in Auckland, New Zealand, this powerful point is developed much more.

c. Plan weekly, at the beginning of the week

I'm glad to report that more people are now using a weekly plan instead of just focusing on daily planning. If you haven't tried it, I do strongly encourage you to give it a go – it's faster, and you're far more able to see the gaps, and to think and plan more strategically.

With this e-book you'll find two example pages – one an empty weekly page and the other filled in as a sample.

I'm not saying 'thou shalt use my pages' – one of our major differences from most time management companies is that we don't sell fancy diaries or planners. Instead, feel free to use it for a guide. If you want to print off pages for yourself, you're welcome, and we do sell [yearly pads](#) at for those who've got more to do than muck around preparing a year's worth of pages.

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You'll find the downward view of the hours of your week make it easier to see where the gaps in your time are. A good 7-ring binder diary system gives you the same view, and in Outlook (if you're an electronic diary user), you'll get a similar layout if you select '5-day view' at the View button on the Toolbar.

The key here is to block out time for your proactive activities. Treat them as appointments with yourself, and get them in the diary at the beginning of the week. Then, when items of differing levels of urgency come at you, it gives you a moment of pause while you quickly decide if the potential new activity is of higher importance than what you'd already planned.

The same method applies with **monthly planning**. I now find, because I've integrated this method so fully, and because of the type of work I do, that planning on a monthly basis is even faster and more effective, with just a quick review at the beginning of each week.

d. Every day work your 1- 5 daily plan

Most people know what they should do for the day, but allow events to overtake them. They dodge frenetically from crisis to crisis, task to task. Instead, try this very simple process.

1. At the beginning of the day (or the night before), make a list of all the things you want to do for the day, in no particular order.
2. Then identify the top 5 activities, and number them 1 through 5, wherever they are on the list. Don't bother to number the rest of the list yet - just the top 5.
3. Start at No. 1, and don't go off it until you've finished, gone as far as you wish to go, or as far as you're able to go.
4. When interruptions come, as they always do, ask yourself, 'Is this new activity more important than the one I'm working on?' If it's not, add the new thing to your list, put it out of eye-range so it doesn't distract you, and stay focused on the more important activity. If it is more important, put the other task aside, work on the new job, and when completed go back to your list (which has been considered and thought about before the day started bossing you around!).
5. Each time you move to a lesser number, check the list. If something that's jumped on the list during the day is of higher priority than the activity you'd planned to do, give it lead position. The other things won't go away, but because they're on the list instead of jostling for mind space, you can keep them under tight rein - they won't distract you

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6. If there's any day left once the top 5 and their relevant queue jumpers have been handled, go back to the list and number off another 5. This saves time at the beginning of the day prioritising things which you may never get to.

This simple technique is credited with coming from management consultant Ivy Lee about 100 years ago. Legend has it that he taught it to Charles Schwab, head of Bethlehem Steel, who paid him \$25,000. When a newspaper reporter, years later, asked Mr. Schwab why he paid so much for such seemingly simple advice (Mr. Lee had merely asked him to send a cheque for what he thought it was worth, once he and his managers had used it for a month) he replied that it was the most important advice he'd ever received, and largely responsible for driving Bethlehem Steel through to the pre-eminent position it subsequently enjoyed in the US steel market.

Keep your planning simple.

Tips and Techniques

How can you do things better and faster? What do you need to learn to get the job done faster

My second book, ['About Time – 120 Tips for Those with No Time'](#) is full of great examples, but here are a few to lubricate your thoughts:

- Computer shortcuts – using keystrokes instead of mouse movements for everything.
- Better systems. Anything you do repetitiously can be templated. If it's a computer activity you may be able to make a macro for it.
- Put a short-cut icon on your bottom toolbar for any regularly used programs, so you can open them in one click.
- Any sequence of words you use regularly in an email can have a signature created for it. Then, instead of retyping common phrases, you just choose the relevant signature. With one click you could have any number of words (hundreds, if you wish!) imbedded in an email.
- Improved delegation. What can you train someone else at a lower pay rate to do, freeing you up for higher value activities?
- Learn to minimise your movements; it will take less time to complete tasks.

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- Put things away as you go – then you never have to tidy up. It becomes invisible. This applies to filing, notes from meetings, contents of your briefcase as you return from a trip or a meeting, as well as the way you manage your domestic ‘stuff’. (Guys, it applies to your garage. Mothers, try doing this every time you get out of the car with a load of kids and gear.)
- Get ready first. If you find yourself constantly dashing out the door stressed because you’re running late, get ready first, set an alert or alarm to prompt you when it’s time to stop, and *then* carry on with your other work.

Sanity Gaps

How do you recharge?

Here’s my definition of *creative procrastination*, from my first book, best-seller [Getting A Grip On Time](#) (You thought procrastination was all bad, didn’t you!)

‘Creative procrastination is putting off until tomorrow that which won’t advance your life plan by being done today. It is also the planned and deliberate gift of prime time to yourself regularly, doing what gives you greatest satisfaction, including not doing anything, if that is your choice.

‘It is learning how to leave undone those things which didn’t really need to be done, so that you achieve balance and satisfaction in your life.’

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To summarise, and for those who like a visual overview, I've designed this profound yet simple summary like a drop-down menu.

| Big Picture | Plan & Prioritise | Tips & Techniques | Sanity Gaps |
|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Make the right choices</p> <p>Set goals in:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self and well being 2. Business and career 3. Home and family 4. Community and humanity | <p>Effectiveness</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Urgent or important 2. Proactive focus 3. Weekly plan 4. Daily plan | <p>Efficiency</p> <p>Efficiency tips – any shortcuts that will help you get your work done faster and more efficiently</p> | <p>Enjoy life</p> <p>Recharge time</p> |

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Have fun getting a grip on time.

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Weekly Planning Sheet

WEEK ENDING _____

| GOALS FOR WEEK | | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|---|------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--------|
| Self & Well-Being | 7am | | Gym | | Gym | | | |
| <i>Buy Think & Grow Rich</i> & read 15 mins p.d. | 8am | Planning time | | | | | Gym | |
| Gym x 3 p.w. | 9am | | Call travel agent arrange w'end | Phone prospects | Individual staff | | | |
| | 10am | Suppliers' Mtg | | | meetings (6x30min) | | | |
| Business & Career | 11am | | Accountant - review systems | Southern client visits | | | | |
| Book a management course Ph. 5 business prospects | 12pm | <i>Buy Think & Grow Rich</i> | | | | | Clean up tool shed | |
| Spend time with accountant reviewing our systems | 1pm | Brief Janet re training | | | Lunch with Bob - discuss | Marketing mtg. | | |
| | 2pm | | | | marketing ideas | | | |
| Home & Family | 3pm | | | | | | | |
| Arrange a romantic w'end | 4pm | Staff meeting | | | | | | |
| Have a family scrabble night | 5pm | | | | | | | |
| Clean up the tool shed | 6pm | | | | | | | |
| Community & Humanity | 7pm | | Ph. Squash Club President | | Scrabble night with children | | Dinner with Bob & Sue | |
| Ring Squash Club President | 8pm | Discuss w'end away with Phil | | Squash Club comm. Meeting | | | | |
| re security system | 9pm | | | | | | | |

Weekly Planning Sheet

WEEK ENDING

| GOALS FOR WEEK | | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|---------------------------------|------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| Self & Well-Being | 6am | | | | | | | |
| | 7am | | | | | | | |
| | 8am | | | | | | | |
| | 9am | | | | | | | |
| | 10am | | | | | | | |
| Business & Career | 11am | | | | | | | |
| | 12pm | | | | | | | |
| | 1pm | | | | | | | |
| | 2pm | | | | | | | |
| Home & Family | 3pm | | | | | | | |
| | 4pm | | | | | | | |
| | 5pm | | | | | | | |
| Community & Humanity | 6pm | | | | | | | |
| | 7pm | | | | | | | |
| | 8pm | | | | | | | |
| | 9pm | | | | | | | |
| | 10pm | | | | | | | |