

MANAGING YOUR SCHEDULE

BEING busy has become a status symbol. If you're not struggling to keep up with all you have to do, you may feel you're not making it. But the reverse is true. The more stress your schedule is causing, the less effective and productive you are.

Instead of packing your days with more than you could get done in a week, use your time in the most productive way possible. You'll get more done in less time and feel more satisfied with the results.

What you'll accomplish in this section:

- Learn how to regain control of your schedule
- Add YOU to your schedule
- "Save" time by consolidating and outsourcing
- Set time limits and create uninterrupted blocks of time
- Start avoiding urgencies and enhance your focus
- Develop the ability to promise less and enjoy more

If we take care of the minutes, the years will take care of themselves.
~ Benjamin Franklin

For every hour of planning, 3 to 4 hours are wasted while waiting for information, not being prepared, and poorly managed tasks.

The more stress your schedule is causing, the less effective and productive you are.

Nine Ways to Tame Your Schedule

1. Under-schedule yourself daily

As you plan your day, schedule only three-fourths of the available time. For example, during a 40-hour workweek, schedule just 30 hours. This gives you 10 "extra" hours to handle the inevitable unplanned tasks and emergencies that pop up. You'll also have time for thinking, planning, and other creative activities.

Action: *How many hours will you "un-schedule" this week?*

2. Under-promise throughout the day

As you plan your day, allow yourself to lower your expectations and take on fewer commitments. This one simple step will create less pressure and increase your energy dramatically throughout the day. If you've already made so many commitments that your schedule is booked for the next several weeks, renegotiate as many as possible to lighten your load.

Action: *What commitments can you renegotiate to free up some breathing space in your schedule?*

Action: *In what ways will you under-promise today?*

3. Schedule daily appointments with yourself

We tend to honor the appointments on our schedule, typically putting them above the tasks on our to-do list. You

He who would make serious use of his life must always act as though he had a long time to live and schedule his time as though he were about to die.

~ Emile Littre

Underschedule and under-promise every day.

can use that tendency to focus on scheduled commitments to your advantage by making appointments with yourself. This will help you work on the projects that are most important to you. Become your own consultant and add periodic planning sessions with yourself to your planner. Use that time to decide where you want to direct your energy and time.

Action: *What two time slots during the day will you reserve for yourself?*

- (1) _____
- (2) _____

4. Save time in your daily schedule

You can't really "save" time. But you can use time productively that would otherwise be squandered. When you're standing in line or waiting for appointments, catch up on material you need to read. Use technology to increase your productivity by loading digital documents onto your PDA or laptop to read or handle when you're on the go. Consolidate errands so that you make only one trip. Review the activities that fill your day and determine ways they could be done more efficiently or eliminated. By shaving minutes off several tasks throughout the day, you can free up a larger block of time later.

Action: *How will you save time in your schedule today?*

5. Outsource

You can't do everything on your own. Trying to do it all alone is a common cause of stress and low productivity. You need to focus your attention on your priorities. Consider outsourcing the activities that drain your efforts and energy so that you can leverage your time for goal-related tasks. Don't think of it as burdening someone else. The tasks you hand off to others may help them fulfill their own goals.

There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full.

~ Henry Kissinger

You can't really "save" time. But you can use time productively that would otherwise be squandered.

Consider outsourcing the activities that drain your efforts and energy so that you can leverage your time for goal-related tasks.

Action: *What activities will you outsource this week?*

Quantify what you are going to accomplish by imposing a time deadline or budget on your activities.

6. Set time limits

Realize how valuable your time is and quantify what you are going to accomplish by imposing a time deadline or budget on your activities. At the start of a phone conversation, let the other person know how much time you have for the conversation. Do not go over your time limit. Make phone calls right before lunch or at the end of the day so that the other person is motivated to end them more quickly. Schedule appointments with start **and** end times.

Action: *In what ways will you begin to set time limits for your activities this week?*

Avoid activities that seem urgent but merely distract you from accomplishing your important long-range projects.

7. Avoid urgent activities

Avoid activities that seem urgent but merely distract you from accomplishing your important long-range projects. It's tempting to think that a few minutes here and there won't matter, but they add up faster than you realize. If you spend the majority of your day putting out fires, you'll never find time for the important activities in your life.

When someone asks you to do something that doesn't specifically need your attention, use this phrase with a smile: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm afraid I don't have the time to take care of that in the way it deserves. Thank you for thinking of me." Commit that phrase to memory. Practice it. And use it consistently.

Action: *What are 2-3 seemingly urgent, but unimportant, activities you can avoid this week?*

- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____

8. Narrow your focus

A critically important ability for effective time management is focus. Spreading your attention among an assortment of tasks is draining and counterproductive. By narrowing your focus to your highest priority, you'll automatically ensure greater productivity.

Action: *In what ways will you narrow your focus this week?*

9. Set aside uninterrupted time

Interruptions are barriers to effective time management. One way to avoid interruptions is to close your door and make it clear that you are not to be disturbed. Another is to schedule regular meetings, using this time for non-pressing issues with people you interact with the most. You might also schedule blocks of time for phone calls and let people know that you will return their calls at those times.

Action: *In what ways will you set aside uninterrupted time this week?*

An average interruption during the work day consumes ten to twenty minutes in getting back on track, not counting the actual time with the interrupter.

Interruptions are barriers to effective time management.

BALANCE BUILDER #3: Promise Less, Enjoy More

One of the greatest contributors to imbalance and stress is the self-defeating habit of overpromising. You overpromise every time you make a commitment to yourself or another, implicitly or explicitly, that you will be challenged to keep.

When we overpromise, we set ourselves up to lose. We seem to think that if a promise isn't a stretch, it doesn't mean anything. Or if it's easy for us to fulfill, we'll lose our motivation. This simply isn't true. While the adrenaline rush of hurtling full-speed toward a deadline has a certain motivating quality, it is exhausting and stressful.

The delight of having made a smaller commitment, then surprising yourself and the others involved with what you actually deliver is a far better and more sustainable motivator.

The following daily exercises are to be completed over a week's time. Mark your calendar and spend time completing the exercise for each day.

Monday:

Honesty and compassion

The objective of underpromising is to be more honest and compassionate with ourselves and others. When we don't know how to be compassionate, we frequently overextend ourselves, demanding more and more. Without a commitment to honesty, we try to win others' confidence by making grandiose promises, then scurrying to deliver what we said we would. By setting ourselves up this way, we guarantee, even if we complete what we promised, that we will exhaust our energy and inner resources and rob ourselves of stillness and peace.

Underpromising gives us a reserve from which to create high achievement, increased confidence, and the momentum for great things to occur in our lives.

While customers, lovers, family, and friends may seem to want big promises from us, and while the overpromising lifestyle is seductive, this week is your chance to try a more compassionate, more honest, and ultimately more fulfilling way of life.

An acre of performance is worth a whole world of promise.

~ William Dean Howells

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Underpromising gives us a reserve from which to create high achievement, increased confidence, and the momentum for great things to occur in our lives.

Action: *Where do you set yourself up to lose by overpromising?*

Action: *Where can you underpromise right now?*

Tuesday:

The language of underpromising

How you communicate affects how you feel. When you want to use the skill of underpromising, it's important to communicate effectively. This means using language that builds a cushion for you so you don't feel overwhelmed, stressed, or pressured for your time, energy, or activities. Here are a few examples of language you can use to underpromise:

Yes, I can have that done by ...

(Before you answer, add 20% more time than you think it will take to finish. Wouldn't you rather have it done early and impress the other person? This also gives you the space to allow all the other things that will be added to your plate after you commit to this project or activity.)

I'll give it my best shot and report back on...

(Give a date 20% later than you think you need to accomplish what you'd like, but remember... you don't have to specify how much you'll accomplish!)

I'll meet you for lunch at ..."

(Before you answer, add at least 15-30 minutes to the time so that you can arrive early and relax.)

I want to help you and can put in a few hours...

(Rather than dropping everything, promise an hour or two of support. This way, if your time becomes free, you can be there and they will appreciate what you can give.)

Some promises are better left unsaid.

~ Ashlee Simpson

Using underpromising language builds a cushion for you so you don't feel overwhelmed, stressed, or pressured for your time, energy, or activities.

I'd like to say we could do X, but I'm not sure about that yet. I know we can commit to Y, and I'll let you know about the other parts.

(Let people know what parts are certain and where the stretch will be. This will not turn them off; they will be impressed with your honesty and THEN with the miracles you perform without promising to do so.)

Action: *What underpromising language will you use today?*

Wednesday:

Stop overpromising at work

Throughout the day, be aware of the ways you've been overpromising. Begin to promise less and get your motivation from overdelivering rather than from trying to catch up to your deadlines and commitments.

Stop overpromising with ...

Your schedule

With a spouse, a date, or a friend...always give yourself an extra half hour. Learn the delights of being early.

Your boss

When you say you'll have something done, add a week to the schedule. Your boss will be thrilled when you're finished 3 days early. If you're given a deadline, ask to have it moved back.

Your employees

Stop promising more resources, promotions, raises... give what's warranted now, but promise **nothing** for the future.

Your customers

When delivering products or services, always tell them it will take longer and cost more than you think. Then, surprise them and yourself!

A promise made is a debt unpaid.

~ Robert W. Service

Get your motivation from overdelivering rather than from trying to catch up to your deadlines and commitments.

Yourself

When you evaluate your own performance and results, hold realistic, conservative expectations so you can accomplish and deliver more. Most people give themselves far too little credit, wasting precious energy on self-deprecating remarks.

The language of overpromising:

- *I'll call you (and the other five people I need to call) tomorrow.*
- *I'll have the project done by tomorrow (even though I know it will cause me to stay up all night).*
- *I'll be there in 20 minutes (though it's 30 miles away).*

Action: *What overpromising language have you used in the last week related to your schedule, your boss, your customers, your creditors, or yourself?*

Thursday:

Stop overpromising at home

Romantically

Sometimes we oversell ourselves...mildly exaggerating or trying to impress. Undersell yourself instead. It's much more impressive.

With your kids

If you can't do something with a child or give that child something he wants, simply tell him "no" and offer an explanation. Overpromising leads to disappointment and eventually to mistrust.

With your extended family

Don't say you'll be out to visit or you'll write soon unless you will. If you feel the urge to promise, use that energy to actually **do** something.

With your physical home itself

Don't expect yourself to clean, fix, or redecorate your house in the upcoming year if you aren't ready to do it. It might be

We promise according to our hopes and perform according to our fears.

~ Author Unknown

Most people give themselves far too little credit, wasting precious energy on self-deprecating remarks.

better to allow yourself to commit only to things around the house that you want to get done and know you can finish. The language of overpromising:

- *Honey, I'm going to bring you flowers more often.*
- *Kids, I'll be home by six every night from now on!*
- *We'll come over and visit every Sunday because you mean so much to us. (Even worse: if you're making this overpromising remark without consulting other members of your family, you're committing them!)*
- *We'll get the filing under control this weekend.*

Action: *What overpromising language have you used at home in the last week?*

Friday:

Stop overpromising yourself

- *If my meeting is done by 11:30, I can get across town by noon... if I hurry!*
- *Starting next Monday, I'm going to make 20 sales calls a day every day!*
- *I'll lose 20 pounds before the reunion.*
- *I'll clean the garage out soon!*
- *I should get my filing done by the end of the week.*

We are less realistic inside our own minds than anywhere else. Even when we're not chasing the dreams we most long to achieve, we aim for some pretty unrealistic goals. Whether it's "hitting every light just right" so we can rush to our next destination or fitting another personal or work project onto an already-full plate, we repeatedly set ourselves up for failure. Here are some of the most common ways we overpromise ourselves:

Scheduling - packing in too many appointments, too close together

Unrealistic to-do list - more things than we have time to accomplish

Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes... but no plans.

~ Peter Drucker

Even when we're not chasing the dreams we most long to achieve, we aim for some pretty unrealistic goals.

Goals - vague aspirations for which we have inadequate planning or support

Commitments - agreeing to do something we don't have time to do

These are not the kind of challenges you want to be creating in your life! When you stop setting yourself up to fail, you'll reclaim the energy to tackle the callings you were born to answer.

Action: *What are some of the ways you overpromise yourself?*

Once you stop overpromising yourself, you will be delighted to find that the smaller commitments and aspirations, when fulfilled, are much more satisfying than the broken promises you used to make.

*Commitment leads to action.
Action brings your dream closer.*

~ Marcia Wieder

Fulfilling smaller commitments and aspirations is much more satisfying than the broken promises that result from overpromising.

Action Items

- Review the material in this section, focusing on your answers to the questions in the exercises.
- Try each of the nine recommended ways to schedule your time more productively.
- Integrate the methods that work best for you into your life on an on-going basis.
- Complete Balance Builder #3 to experience ways to stop overpromising at work and at home...and to stop overpromising yourself.