

Putting More *Life* in Your Time

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As a time management expert, I'm often asked, "Can you give me more time in my life?" So many of you are looking for more time to do more of what is already exhausting you. How about spending more time "creating the time of your life?" Several of my clients have told me that the time of their life would have no deadlines, no expectations and no responsibilities.

Think back to a great time in your own life. It probably had more meaningful qualities than simply the absence of deadlines, expectations and responsibilities. Think of a time when you were "in love"—with a person, your work, or an artistic expression. You might have heard yourself say, "Time just stood still," or "I don't know where the time went!" When you feel that much passion or joy, you focus on the moment and a sense of past and future fade away. Your busy life makes it hard to focus, stay in the moment, but it is not impossible.

Try some of these approaches, which might have you saying more often, "I had the time of my life."

Be in the moment

In today's fast-paced world, you often feel forced to do two or three things at once and to think about what's next instead of what's now. This mindset can make you feel out of touch. Traditional time management encourages you to multi-task, an activity that is now under much scrutiny as a cause for less productivity and more stress.

Instead:

- Practice "mindfulness." Really be in the moment with a colleague, family member, or the task-at-hand. Concentrate your entire attention on the encounter, and try to push everything else out of your mind.
- Don't think of the future or the past. The deadlines, responsibilities and expectations will remain, but because you've given yourself the opportunity to enjoy the present, you may find yourself better equipped and more willing to deal with these others later.
- Imagine you're in slow motion. It sounds silly, but that's the strategy moviemakers use when they really want you to pay attention. Think of it! You will see things you would not have seen if you were anticipating the next step or next obligation in your day.

Increase "response-ability"

Having the time of your life is less about getting rid of responsibilities and more about increasing your "response-ability."

When faced with a situation that you're less than enthusiastic about, such as serving on a committee, assess your priorities before responding. Ask yourself, "what is most important in my life now and can I give my attention to this new priority?" You can't do it all—you thought you could, but you cannot.

Ask clarifying questions before agreeing to a new responsibility. How much involvement will be necessary? Could you accept only part of the task? Could it be done at a different time with assistance? Even if you agree to the new priority, you'll feel more in control of your actions and your attitude when you ask clarifying questions.

If you decide not to serve on that committee for example, the answers you receive to your questions will give you the information you need to respond appropriately. If you find it difficult to say "no," or are unsure of the approach to use, see the article, "Seven Ways to Say No" at www.designsontime.com.

If you agree to be on the committee or take on a new responsibility, don't complain or whine about your decision. People who create the time of their lives find the good in the commitments they make and then enjoy those aspects of the experience.

Break Rank

Some time management experts think that sticking to a routine reaps greater productivity. There certainly is truth to this conventional wisdom. But do you recall following a routine when you were having the time of your life? Probably not. Consider the role spontaneity has in the time of your life and break rank today.

- Surprise yourself or one of your staff if you are a manager. Tell yourself, or that person, "It time you take an extra 30 minutes for lunch today."
- This weekend, get in your car—alone or with friends or family—and just start driving. Don't plan where you're going to go or even when you're going to turn. Just see where the road takes you. Let go of all the "to-dos" running in your head.
- Stay at home. Rent some travel documentaries or foreign movies. Pretend you're somewhere else. Stay at home and pretend you are on vacation. Take no calls, eat out all meals, and see the sights!
- Do just one thing—anything—differently today or this week. Break the routine.

Don't wait for a block of time to have the time of your life. It won't happen. Find the special moments even a short few moments. Sometimes that's all you have.

Pam Vaccaro, CSP is a professional speaker whose expertise in managing time and attention brings her before audiences internationally. She is a Certified Speaking Professional, the highest earned designation by the National Speakers Association. Her company Designs on Time challenges companies and associations to rethink traditional time management. She is most known for tailored programs and innovative ideas.

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