

Are You At The Top of Your Agenda?

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Our days are just not long enough and when many of us are working upwards of sixty hours a week, good time management skills can make the difference between feeling successful or feeling like a failure, between feeling satisfaction or disappointment. Despite having access to a vast range of time management assistance some of us remain unable to use our time well.

In working with clients the first thing I do is look for the obvious. So when Mary came to me asking for help with time management problems, I asked to see her agenda. Although Mary is a bright, highly motivated and self directed woman she has been unable to finish her dissertation and complete a certification she has spent several years working on and thousands of dollars of her money.

The thing that stood out about her agenda was that she had put all the things she claimed she wanted to do at the bottom in tiny print, not as agenda items, but floating off in a space by themselves. Tasks she is performing for others is up at the top of her agenda in large, bold letters. The obvious thing to me about her agenda is that she unconsciously sidelines herself. Because her work is not high on her list, on some level she doesn't consider it to be important.

Mary is a very confident woman with high self esteem, but she shows a lot of resistance to getting her dissertation done. To get her back onto her own agenda, I had her write "Me First" at the top of the page in large letters. It's not enough just to write the words, my client had to come around to the idea that her time was valuable and take responsibility for it. This didn't happen over night.

The second obvious thing I noticed about my client's time management habits was that she was doing a gazillion things. At first I thought she must be successful and extremely well organized to get so much done until it struck me that she was using this busyness to avoid doing her own stuff. Pretty creative eh?

Mary admitted to me that a lot of what she does all day is a distraction from doing the work she really wants to do; she even distracts herself from her distractions. She also has a bad habit of starting things she is unable or not interested in finishing—which led us to something even juicier but I don't want to get off topic. The point is that she began to realize how much energy she puts into avoiding her own work—energy that she could put to better use elsewhere.

I asked Mary if she could put herself first. Move those tiny agenda items up to the top and write them in large letters. To make some space for her to get her work done, I asked her to prioritize the other work and if possible chop out the work she identified as busy work. She was able to drop several projects when she realized that they were distractions from what she really wants to do.

Mary is working against her resistance which is hard work. For homework, I asked her to be aware of how she distracts herself. Every minute taken to fold socks or rearrange the

files takes valuable minutes and energy from the most productive part of her day. Since then, she now makes a point of seeing each part of her day through without seeking distractions, well almost.

Because the task of completing her thesis seemed overwhelming, I asked her to break it down into smaller pieces that can be managed in a few hours. Mary still distracts herself but she is aware of it and much more focused on her goals.

There can be many reasons why you are not at the top of your agenda. In most cases coaching can help you become the number one person in your life. A good coach will help you identify the patterns in your life that no longer work for you so you can achieve your goals and lead a happier and more productive life.

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