



## Time Management – A New Approach

Despite the technological advances in the last fifty years, people are claiming to have less free time and finding it more difficult to achieve balance in their lives. In order to become more effective, we can turn to “time-management” techniques around scheduling and prioritising our time or we can try a new approach.

My own experience was probably fairly typical. I worked full time and had a family and found myself reacting to circumstances rather than feeling any sense of control over my life. I researched some of the traditional time management techniques but rather than creating more space, I found I was particularly good at finding time that I could fill with something else. Working long hours and juggling family life still meant there was not much time for me or the things that were important. After a stretch of repeated illness, I decided I had outgrown the system and I needed something new.

How can time actually be managed? Whether we accept it or not, there will only ever be 24 hours in a day and for 6-8 hours of that we will need to sleep. Time can't be managed. All we have personal power over is how we manage ourselves in that time, or rather, how we manage our energy.

### You can do anything but not everything

Whatever we give our energy to will change. We need to become selective about where we spend that energy. Our energy is our most valuable commodity. Everything in our lives is a claim on that energy and every new project is another demand on our resources. If we are constantly doing a great deal and not achieving very much, it is likely that our energy is dispersed and we need to focus on redirecting our attention to the things that matter.

The first step is to look at where we are focussing our attention and to create space for the things that are most important to us. The wheel of life is a useful activity here (see appendix 1). Begin by thinking about how satisfied you are with each area of your life. So for example, the first spoke on the wheel represents health. Imagine that each spoke represents a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 is the centre of the wheel and 10 is the outer line). Mark a cross on the spoke to show how satisfied you are with that area of your life *now*. Repeat for the other spokes (close family, money etc). Once you have a cross on each spoke, join the crosses together to form a circular shape. From this, you will see how well your wheel of life is currently running.



The second part of the activity is to decide if this is how you want your life to be. If not, what needs to change? Now is the time to make choices and commitments that will enable you to create your life as more of how you want it to be. What we consistently focus upon will produce the results in our life – good or bad. Start saying “yes” to the important things that represent these areas of life you want to change.

### **Your productivity is only as good as your intentions**

Productive people don't tend to have “to do lists”. They have action lists that are linked to clear intentions about what they want to achieve. They will rarely do anything that is not linked to their intentions. Their intentions are like a North Star – a reference point for success. Actions without intentions are meaningless and we may struggle procrastinate.

If we imagine a pyramid, intentions are closest to our overall mission or purpose. Our mission or purpose is what we are here for, whether that is our career, our family or something even bigger.





Our intentions are what we will do to deliver on our purpose. Clear statements of intent about what we will create, or do or be. From our intentions we can decide upon the projects, tasks and actions that will serve these goals.

Without intentions, we could easily end up doing for doing's sake. (Appendix 2 gives a worksheet with some questions to consider in forming intentions)

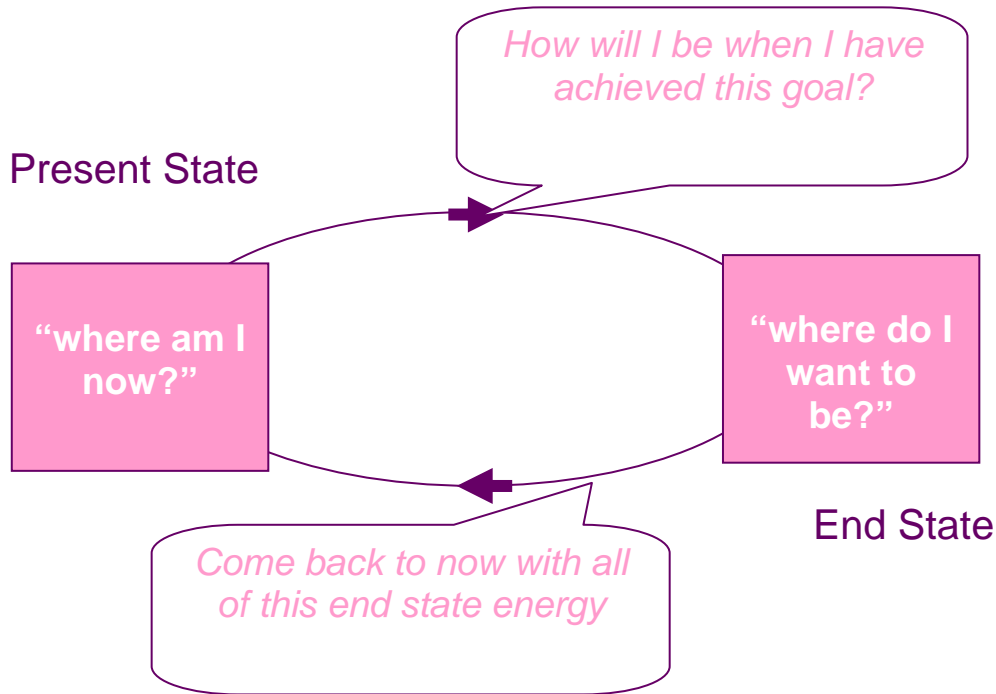
Once you know where you are going, it is much easier to say no to the things that are not important. We can create space by letting go of those projects, tasks or actions that do not lead us to achieving our intentions

### **Why wait until the end to feel good about what you are doing?**

When we start a new project, it is easy to become overwhelmed by all that there is to do. We may not be able to find the motivation to get started or question our competence or ability to succeed. Often how we will feel when we complete the activity is actually the feeling or state we need to get going.

For example, imagine that you decide to get married. Planning a wedding is one of the biggest stressors in our lives. Thinking about all the tasks (finding a venue, choosing what to wear, picking the flowers etc) can seem like an insurmountable task. Imagine now the feeling that you will have on your special day. That feeling is often the energy that motivates us to tackle the tasks. The anticipation and excitement of the forthcoming event is the driving force behind the project.

Now imagine that you are asked to start a difficult project at work (for example doing a presentation)? We could use the same strategy to motivate ourselves.



Firstly think about where you are now (present state) and where it is that you want to end up (end state). Ask yourself “How will I be when I have achieved this goal?” Really tap into how you will be feeling? How will you know that you are feeling that way?

When you are really associated to those feelings, come back to the present and notice the difference? How do you feel about tackling that project now?

End state energy is a powerful technique for reducing overwhelm and procrastination

### **What is the next smallest step that moves you towards your intentions?**

The next part of the process is to identify the smallest step that will move us towards our goals and our intentions. Often when we begin a project, we will project plan in detail every action that needs to happen. Whilst this can be useful in mapping out a project and identifying likely timescales and resources, often we can get hooked into the project plan and this then controls our actions rather than how we manage the plan.



An alternative approach is to tackle projects with a “next smallest step” approach. In the present state, fired up with all of the end state energy from the last exercise, ask yourself, “what is the one thing that will move me closer to my goal?”

### Present State



### End State

For example, you want to enhance your energy (intention) and know that exercising is good for your health. You regularly *think about* getting fit, joining a gym, starting swimming etc. But that is all you ever seem to get round to doing – thinking about it! “Exercising” as an action is too big to tackle. Imagine now that you decide you would like to try Yoga. Your next action may be just to get the phone number you have seen in the newsagent or to look on the internet for classes in your area. It’s a smallest step – specific and achievable. Once you have achieved that action, you can then decide on the next smallest step that is leading you towards your intention of enhancing your energy

Breaking it down into the smallest parts makes it much easier to achieve our goals. Often our to-do lists, written or held in our heads, contain many things that aren’t really specific or strategic actions. If the next smallest step seems overwhelming, you know that it is too big. Try breaking it down into a smaller step and see how different that feels. You only need to choose your next smallest step. The advantage of doing things this way is it allows for new information to emerge. It is easy to get hooked into a project plan and the must, should and ought to do. By the time you complete this next step, everything may have changed and you may no longer want to do it! This way, you won’t have invested energy into the whole process so it is much easier to change direction or let it go and choose something different. (Appendix 3 gives a framework for mapping out some of your next smallest steps.)



## Summary

- Whatever we give energy to will change. If our lives aren't quite as we would like them to be, we can look at where we are focussing our attention and make commitments and choices to the things that are important.
- Intentions are our guiding stars that keep us pointing in the direction of our life goals or purpose. Without these, our actions will lack synergy and meaning. Create space in your life by letting go of projects and tasks that do not fulfil your intentions.
- Before starting a project, ask "how will I be when I have achieved this?" That end state energy provides the motivation to take action and overcomes resistance.
- An action is the next smallest step in the process. Choose your next smallest step from the end state energy. If the next smallest step is overwhelming, it is too big! Only choose your next smallest step. Remember that things may have changed by the time you get there.

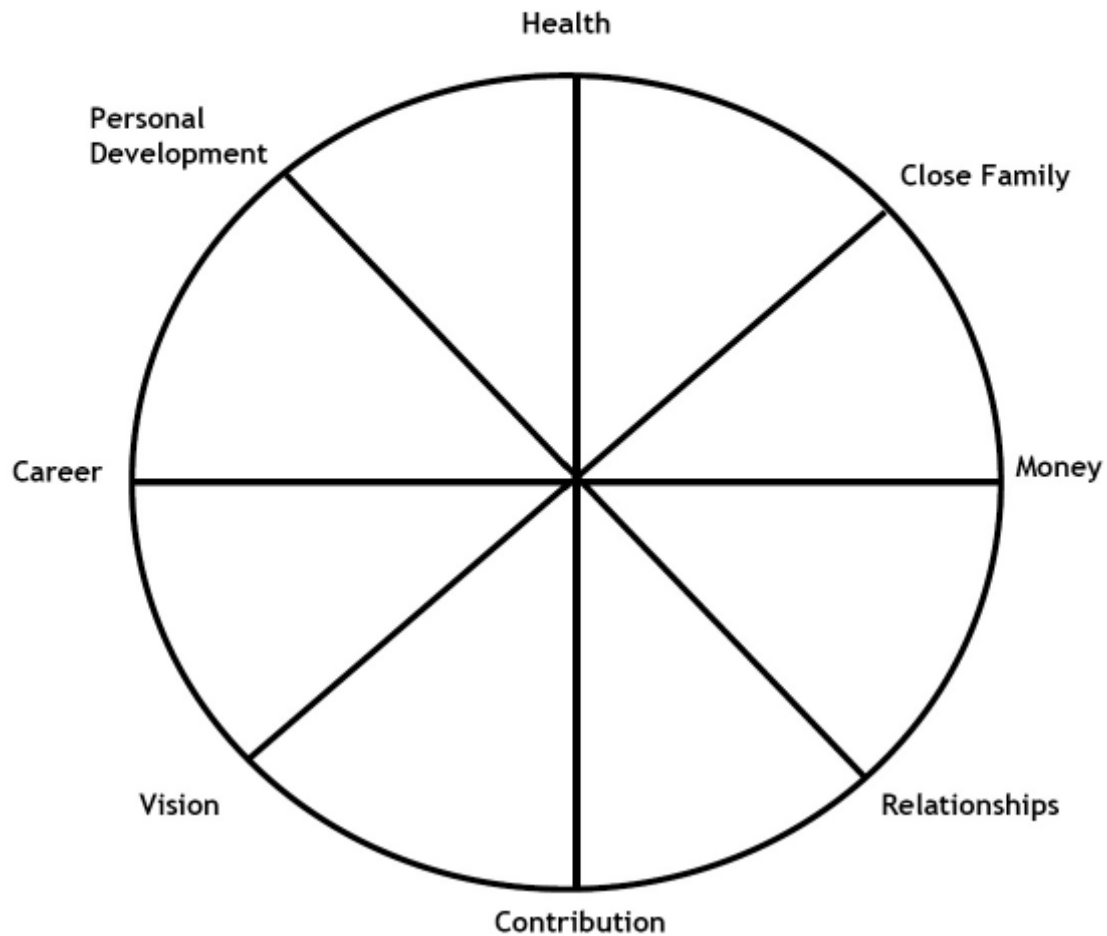
For further information on coaching and workshops on this topic, visit  
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APPENDIX 1

## The Wheel of Life



- When you overachieve at work but underachieve in personal relationships, the negative effects of your personal relationships can adversely affect your performance at work
- When you exceed in business success but ignore your health, you can develop serious illnesses. This means you may need to take time off work and the business may suffer as a consequence
- If your focus is on your personal needs to the extent that you miss or skip work to achieve these, the business will suffer and you may as a result find yourself in financial problems.



**APPENDIX 2**

**INTENTION SETTING**

<b>MISSION/PURPOSE</b>	
How would you summarise your mission, purpose or vision? This could be in work or at home, or both.	
<b>What are your core values?</b>	
<b>How well do your values align with your mission/purpose?</b>	
<b>What are your top 3 goals or dreams?</b>	
1	
2	
3	
<b>What is draining you? – what tasks in your work/life are stealing your energy and need your attention right now?</b>	
<b>What will be your intentions?</b>	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	



**APPENDIX 3**

**End State Energy and Next Smallest Steps**

<b>What are the key projects I need to focus on to achieve my intentions?</b>	<b>How will I be when I have achieved this?</b>	<b>What is the next smallest step or strategic action I need to take to achieve this?</b>