

Let the Clock Work for You

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If you're like most people, you feel time-strapped, time-bound, flat out of time.

We found three busy people who are frustrated with time constraints. We asked them to keep a record of their activities for a day. Time-organizing expert Faith Manierre was then asked to offer suggestions on how these three and everyone can cheat time, or at least tolerate it a bit more peacefully.

Manierre, the owner of Busy Bees Professional Organizing in Glastonbury, helps people organize everything—whether schedules, Tupperware or business files.

The key to feeling satisfied with your use of time, she said, is to know what's most important to you.

"You have to realize," she said, "that you have the power to make choices."

Bill Kaehrle

When his 4-year-old started preschool in September, Bill Kaehrle, a stay-at-home dad in West Hartford, was sure he would have time to resume his workouts at the pool, but somehow it hasn't happened.

"Something always seems to come up," said Kaehrle. "I can't seem to get there." Nor are the household- painting bookshelves, repairing windows – getting done.

Instead, his mornings are cluttered with errands and routine chores like raking the leaves, servicing the cars and preparing for the classes he teaches three nights a week at a culinary school.

Kaehrle's wife, Patty, is a patient care coordinator who leaves for work at 6 a.m. and returns at about 4 p.m.

Kaehrle is very happy to have time at home with his children: Allie, 5 and Martin, 4. He talks glowingly of his dad inspired field trips: to construction sites, the airport, his friend's auto shop and Dunkin' Donuts.

"We have had so much fun, doing like crazy stuff; I know they wouldn't get that in day care," said Kaehrle.

But somehow his hope for a little more personal time this year hasn't materialized.

Suggested solutions: Manierre suggested that Kaehrle try to get more of his chores and teaching preparations done on the weekend, perhaps on Sunday night, so that his weekday mornings would be freer for swimming.

Kaehrle admits he spends too much time cruising the Internet and checking out eBay.

“It’s really a choice,” Manierre told him. “You can choose to play around on the computer or eBay, or you can choose to use the time for classroom preparation....Is swimming something you really want to do, or is it something you feel like you should do?”

As for household tasks, Manierre urged Kaehrle to prioritize and not veer from the list. If he paints the bookcases and window lifts, he might not get to wash the cars or rake leaves.

“You have to decide: Is this what you really want to do?” said Manierre. “If it makes you feel good, and you want to do it, you’ve got to make the time.”

A week later: Kaehrle reports with the enthusiasm of a time-conqueror that he made it to the pool three times since his conversation with Manierre.

“I’m just making it (swimming) a priority and then squeezing in whatever chores I can, rather than getting the chores done first and getting sidetracked,” says Kaehrle.

And he reports that he has had some “banner days” completing household tasks because he is paying more attention to his priorities list.

Joyce Hamilton

Joyce Hamilton of Bloomfield sets high standards for herself. A divorced mother of a 14-year-old son, she has long been a social activist.

She was happy when she could merge her personal mission with paid employment as associate director of Democracy Works, a Hartford nonprofit organization that strives to ensure full participation in our democracy.

She also teaches a course on the Caribbean American family at the University of Hartford and is on the board of La Casa de Puerto Rico and several other groups. Often she is invited to several fund-raising or other events each week.

Also weighing on Hamilton is an unfinished doctorate. She completed her studies in the fall of 1996 but hasn’t found the time to finish her dissertation on social policy.

“Well-intentioned friends and family are always asking, ‘Are you done yet?’” said Hamilton. “When they do, my anxiety hits me full in the face.”

And then there’s exercise. She’s been thinking she really should find a way to fit it in.

Her top priority, however, is Jovan, her son. This fall, her responsibilities for him were slightly reduced because he was spending more nights with his father, whose home is nearer to Jovan's high school.

Hamilton was finding that she was committing herself to more and more evening events—something she realized she was unhappy about when she looked at her time carefully.

Suggested solutions: For Hamilton, just jotting down her schedule was a revelation.

Although it was convenient for Jovan to spend more time at his father's, she saw a pattern developing that she didn't like.

“What hit me is that every evening this week, I will potentially be home late,” said Hamilton. “I realize I can't do this. I will pass on things. My priority is my family, my child, and that's what I want to do.”

Writing down her schedule was “like holding up a mirror,” Hamilton told Faith Manierre, a time organization expert in Glastonbury. “I realized, my goodness, it's really up to me.”

“Yes,” said Manierre. “If you're out every night, the value you say you have about being with your son is being set aside.”

Now that she is paid to work as a sort of social activist, Hamilton said she may pull back on her other “save the world” commitments.

Manierre also had Hamilton rate various areas of her life—career, family, money, health, friends and fun. Hamilton realized she was scrimping on the “fun and recreation” in her life and needed to add some.

As for the doctorate, Manierre questioned how important this was to Hamilton. “I've invested a lot of money into it, and I want to complete it for personal satisfaction,” Hamilton said.

Hamilton said she would find a few hours to return to her doctorate work in January, when her son is busy on Saturdays.

A week later: Hamilton was canceling evening commitments, limiting them to two a week, and had shifted the arrangement with her ex-husband so that Jovan was again spending more weekday nights with her.

Hamilton said she feels her career and family life are better balanced now.

She hasn't managed to squeeze exercise into her life yet, but she is determined to do so. “It's hard to do that without feeling selfish, but now I'm giving myself permission. I see it as self-nurturing.”

Maurya Couvares

Almost no one's schedule seems quite as frantic with must-dos as a high school senior-student athlete.

Maurya Couvares, 17, is up at 6 a.m., at school by 7:15 a.m., at swim practice from 6 to 8 p.m. and crams in homework after school and after practice. She takes three advanced-placement courses at Manchester High School and also spends time editing the school newspaper and presiding over the student council. And then there are college applications and studying for SAT's.

A habitual list-keeper, Couvares said that lately she looks at her list and feels overwhelmed.

"I wish that for once I could make the list go away or at least get very small," she said.

She would also like more time to do her homework well, more time to visit her father in Windsor and more time to herself.

Suggested solutions: Time expert Faith Manierre urged Couvares to tighten up her study habits by using a kitchen timer. She suggested an intense half-hour of study followed by a short break. She also suggested she turn off the instant messenger when she is writing her English essays.

"I do find myself talking online to my friends," said Couvares.

Couvares should also take advantage of her extended free periods at school to get her hardest subjects done when she is feeling energetic, Manierre said.

Because as a senior Couvares can leave campus, she has used those free periods partly to run errands.

"I do a lot of selective procrastinating." She said.

Manierre suggested Couvares divide her to-do lists into now, short-term and long-term categories and that she put no more than five items on the "now" list.

A week later: Couvares doesn't have a kitchen timer, but she has tried to set up intense study periods. She is surprised at how much she can get done when not distracted by the instant messenger. She now tackles her tougher subjects during her free morning periods. She was amazed when she was able to complete the entire application for Georgetown University during one of those free blocks of time.

And her to-do lists seems much less intimidating now when broken into categories, and she is less likely to procrastinate with homework assignments on the "now" list. She is still working on more time for visits with her father and relaxation.