

Planning To Take Control

*Time is Life.
To waste your time is
to waste your life –
planning helps you
start taking control of
your life.*

Planning is the key to exercising greater control in your life. Everyone has to plan in order to achieve the things they want. It may be a plan for tomorrow's work or next year's vacation. When you make a plan, you are of course aiming to define a course of action within a certain time frame that will enable you to achieve your goals in the easiest and most efficient possible manner.

However, just because you plan, doesn't necessarily mean it will happen. But without planning, it is very doubtful you will achieve

your goals other than by good fortune. Plans are like a rudder, to help guide you towards completion of your goals.

• The Essentials of Planning

Planning is something that we should allocate some time to every day. When you undertake the planning process, you need to consider both long term and short term perspectives:

- i) take a realistic look at the future, and establish some achievable but challenging goals.
- ii) try to anticipate likely problems or difficulties that may be encountered.
- iii) identify alternative ways of handling these problems, and weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative, to see which one is best.
- iv) develop a course of action, with clear time frames, to follow.

Planning then, consists of thinking about the future so that you can anticipate what will probably happen - identifying things over which you have no control and to which you must simply be prepared to adjust to - as well as things over which you can exercise some control and change. But because, however, not everything can be accurately predicted there must be a certain degree of flexibility built into our planning process. We must be willing to recognise when we need to amend a planned course of action in the light of new information which may emerge, or on the basis that earlier circumstances have changed.

Some people spend too much time worrying about what they don't want to occur, and too little time concentrating upon what they do want to achieve. Once you clearly define your goals and priorities, then you can start making more disciplined decisions about how you will use your time.

Forward planning can then help you take advantage of emerging opportunities, as much as perhaps creating some. **"Chance favours the prepared mind"** (Louis Pasteur)

• Planning - An Investment

Some people say that they are simply too busy to take the time to plan properly. This is a bit like the woodcutter madly trying to cut down a big tree with a blunt axe, saying that he doesn't have the time to sharpen the blade. Then he wonders why he seems to feel so tired and anguished.

Other people say that planning is not worth the effort, because so many things change around the place. Don't get trapped by this thinking, otherwise you may start to see yourself as a victim of circumstance, controlled by external events - instead of someone who can positively influence events around you.

Disciplined planning is the key to avoiding the unnecessary stress of many crises and will enable you to **maintain a proper sense of balance in your life** :

*"Plan how you will make use of your time.
 Ensure that you take time to **think** - it is the source of your power.
 Take time to **play** - it is the source of perpetual youth and vitality.
 Take time to **read** - it is the source of wisdom.
 Take time to **love** and be loved - it is a privilege.
 Take time to **laugh** - it is music for the soul.
 Take time to **give** - it is too short a day to be selfish.
 Take time to do your **work** diligently - it is the price of success.
 Take time to **improve yourself** - lest change pass you by".*

- **The Myth Of Trying To Fit It All In !**

Many people operate on the mistaken belief that they have enough time to do everything.

Some believe if they just work faster and "hurry up", then they can fit it all in. And yet this often produces problems. Under "hurry up" conditions people can be more likely to make time consuming mistakes.

Working longer or harder is a second strategy that is often adopted. However, this can mean that personal time is sacrificed as work time increases. Fatigue can often be a consequence, both mental and physical. Hours may be spent trying to solve a problem, that a fresh mind could have solved more quickly. *The key in planning, is to focus on doing the most important things first.....*

- **Setting Yourself Priorities and Developing Your Schedule....**

Begin by deciding what tasks and activities must be done today, this week, or this month in order to advance you towards your goals. If a project seems overwhelming or complex, break it down into manageable steps that can be handled one at a time.

Write up a "Things To Do" list. Include all of the things which you would like to accomplish, then go through the list and number the items in the sequence that reflects their level of priority. Then, beginning with the highest priority item, write next to it the estimated amount of time likely needed in order to complete the item (building a bit of fat into the estimate to allow for likely interruptions) - this should then enable you to subsequently schedule your day around these estimated times, on the basis of doing "**first things first**" – you can ensure you do the things that really matter. Be willing to re-assess your to do list and priorities during the day in the light of changing circumstances, sometimes this may have a shifting effect on the level of importance of particular tasks.

A USEFUL question to ask yourself is "What will happen if I don't do this?"