



Make THIS The Year of Sanity!

7 Tips to Help You Save Time, Reduce Stress and Increase Your Sanity!

I'll never forget one evening hurriedly trying to prepare pork chops (because they're quick and easy) while fussing at my husband to grab the DVD remote control and turn on Baby Einstein so my son would stop crying. After 20 minutes of searching for the remote control to no avail, I opened the refrigerator only to find that I'd conveniently dropped the it in the ice cube tray while getting some ice for my daughter's juice earlier – simple mistake ☺ After all, doesn't everyone drop the remote control in the ice cube tray every once in awhile??? Actually, the more I talk to busy professionals (particularly women), the more I hear a resounding YES! I'm no psychologist, and I certainly won't label myself insane, but on a bad day, my life certainly reflects pure insanity. At least it did until I learned to make some simple changes that made a huge difference in not only my sanity and happiness but also my productivity and efficiency.

A new year is unavoidably a time of reflection – how can I do things better, smarter, faster this year? Invariably women particularly commit to decoding the perpetually insolvable mystery of how to “have it all”. If you're like me, your New Year's resolutions are filled with strangely familiar déjà vu like items like lose 10 pounds, save more for retirement, attend church regularly, volunteer at your child's school, etc. and those are all great goals, but after years of consulting individuals and teams on improving their efficiency and effectiveness, I can't help but suggest a new resolution – make this year, THE year of sanity. The year that you really do stop running around like a chicken with your head cut off and begin strategically, proactively living a life that's balanced, focused, and sane! The real question of course is HOW do you do that? I fully admit that I don't have a panacea (no one does unfortunately), but I have learned that simple changes can make a HUGE impact. Once those small changes have been implemented, try a few more...then before you know it...sanity ☺

Suggestions for increasing day to day sanity...

1. Restrict the daily “things to do list” to 5 items. Emotionally, it feels draining and a bit debilitating to NEVER accomplish your “to do list”. (At least it did for me.) Most of us set ourselves up for failure by creating a “to do list” that Hillary Clinton on her best 30 hour day couldn't even complete. So, let's try being honest with ourselves. No, you're NOT going to get all 12 things done ANYWAY so why not just get into the habit of restricting your daily list to no more than 5 items (that you really can accomplish – ok 6 if you're a complete list addict) and feel good about completing them! If you're scratching your head saying that's completely unrealistic, don't turn the page...see suggestion #2.
2. This week pick 3 things to STOP doing. Everyone has recurring activities that don't really add much value, but we do them either out of habit, guilt, or pure insanity. Instead of continuing to methodically plod through each task or activity, ask yourself “*What could I stop doing tomorrow/this week with minimal impact on my life?*”

Here are a few potentials for the chopping block:

- Cancelling a magazine subscription that you really don't have time to read anyway
- Extricating yourself from Board or another volunteer activity that isn't terribly fulfilling
- Eliminating 90 minutes spent on Sundays scouring for/clipping coupons that only end up saving you less than \$3 because you typically forget to bring them with you shopping anyway
- Stop attending random professional organization meetings that might have been great for you earlier in your career but you're now attending out of habit.



3. Get help! Sometimes we've become so used to doing everything ourselves, we forget that we can actually get help for most tasks these days. If you're a small business owner, consider paying a college student \$12-\$15/hr a few hours a week to prepare presentations, blog for you, format newsletters, or assist with other time consuming administrative tasks. Possibly consider hiring someone a few hours in the evening to help with domestic activities like cooking/cleaning, running errands, helping with kids, etc. I've found that when I get help, it not only frees me up, but oftentimes produces a much better result because they can often do a better job than I could! Remember, help helps!
4. Institute strict Blackberry/iPhone restrictions to enable you to be fully present when you need to be. Start with "MAD" (meetings, eating, and driving) restrictions – Get into the habit of putting your phone in a closed drawer while meeting, eating, or driving. When we're partially attentive, we not only lose productivity (and possibly risk safety), but we also send a signal to the other person that they're not important enough to require our full attention. Whether the other person is our boss, client, a colleague, our spouse, or our kids, we're chipping away at our relationship with that person little by little. Honestly, it's rude to type on your Blackberry while you're in a meeting or talking to your spouse. Don't make the mistake of assuming that because the behavior is commonplace, it's not offensive...it still is.
5. Check email three times per day – and that's it! Unless your job absolutely won't allow the restriction, decide that you'll only check/manage email three times per day. Suggested timings for someone working a typical 8-5 shift would be approximately 10:00, 1:00 and 4:30. If that sounds like complete lunacy, let me explain...Most of us are constantly tied to our email throughout the day and instead of reading and sending emails as we really need to, our email serves as an ongoing distraction in many ways keeping us from completing more important tasks oftentimes. What's worse is that oftentimes, we have either a chime or a blinking red light on our phone announcing every incoming email which triggers an automatic Pavlovian need to check the message. For me I know that I could be in the midst of performing life saving heart surgery but if I heard that chime from my inbox, I'd feel compelled to stop and lean over to check the message. Truth be told in most cases, the incoming message is spam (or something nearly as unimportant), but it would still disrupt the mental flow of whatever I was working on. When you multiply this interruption effect times 10, 15, 20 checks/day, you can easily see how this simple habit dramatically impacts our overall efficiency. I also suggest NOT checking email first thing in the morning (difficult I know) to provide you a buffer period of time to proactively decide what is most important for you to focus on first (and not fall into the trap of automatically reading and responding to emails which can often consume much more time than is truly warranted). Also note that when you check email at designated times, you will have accumulated several emails and can run through them much more quickly and truly focus on those that require attention.
6. Commit to giving yourself small gifts daily. Oftentimes, we fret about the big things that we can't seem to get done (take a family trip, refresh a wardrobe, getting a massage), but we don't appreciate the very small touches that we can reward ourselves with without much time or effort. The key is to think about those small things that really pick you up for whatever reason. It could be having fresh cut flowers on your desk, sprinkling lavender oil in your car so you can enjoy the scent while driving, rewarding yourself with a yogurt with your favorite topping mid afternoon, or calling an old friend who always seems to make you laugh. The great news is that once you consistently implement the first five suggestions, you should regain critical time to begin rewarding yourself with the big things too!
7. Schedule daily meetings with yourself! This might sound odd, but it's really not. Most of us don't "schedule" time for our most critical activities (like thinking, analyzing, planning, reevaluating) or for non urgent (yet still



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important) projects like tax document prep, creating a shadow box for your first child, minor home improvement projects, etc. Instead, our days and weeks are typically filled with other people’s priorities – responding to their emails, attending their meetings, etc. Many of my clients complain that their day is filled with so many conference calls, emails and other appointments that by the time they exhale at their desk to tackle some of their priorities, the day is nearly over. Change your paradigm! Set aside “work periods” throughout the day for you to work on your most important items – maybe 7:30-9:00 and 2-3. (Having trouble finding the time? See Tip # 2). Some clients tell me that even if they are forced to cut into their personal work time during one period, they feel tremendous relief knowing that they’ve got another work period set aside that day. Also, many of us have non urgent projects lingering that seem to never get accomplished. That’s because instead of scheduling time to complete them, we have them on our back burner list and are waiting for “free time” to get them done. News flash – THAT TIME WILL NEVER COME. You must schedule the project if you want to complete it. I have time blocked out on my calendar during the first week of January to create my family’s annual photo book and time in February blocked for tax preparation. Block time for you - it really works, and when you get more accomplished, you’ll feel so much better!

Long ago I realized that “having it all” isn’t necessarily “doing it all”. It’s like the “all you can eat” buffet. Do you really want to have everything on the buffet? Of course not, but you want to really enjoy what you do put on your plate. I think that the same is true in life. Don’t drive yourself crazy trying to do everything – pick the most important things...and enjoy!

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