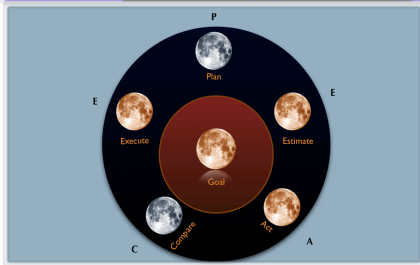




# Quarterly Letter



## THE 24-HOUR DAY

### ORGANIZE

Save your day; before you jump in, invest ten minutes praying, thinking, planning.

### BE REALISTIC

I believe the basic pattern in our 24-hour day is predictable: Interruptions, unplanned tasks, unrealistic expectations, happen often. Rejoice, hunt for the pearl God prepared! Be flexible, do your best; that's good enough!

### DON'T WORRY

We worry about things that do not concern us, about not performing perfectly, and other areas we can't change. Worry drains, stresses, distracts us. It's sinful. Stop; do your best and accept the results.

### ACT

Practice these four actions daily: Do (your priorities), delegate (as needed), defer (with a future action plan), and discard (don't follow stuff on "rabbit trails.")



## "You can't change the past, but you can ruin the present by worrying about the future" - Unknown

Our fast-paced society traps many folks. Events lead them rather than the reverse. They juggle family, work, relationships, other activities, and they hurry constantly. They survive *today*, but look to next week, next month, next year, for relief from *busyness*, which, they don't find. Few realize the issue isn't work, but *attitude* to work.

President of South West Airlines, Colleen C. Barrett, says, "Work is either fun or drudgery. It depends on your attitude." Chuck Swindoll says it well too:

"... we spend more of our time concentrating and fretting over the things that can't be changed in life than we do giving attention to the one thing that can, our choice of attitude."

Your attitude, your world-view, decides your behaviour. *Work is a gift from God. Only God knows the future. You can do everything God wants done, but in His time. Daily, you can't do everything you want to do and others want done.* Someone with these beliefs will behave differently from a person with opposite views.

Look at the *mind map* on page two. It's a typical day! Looks confusing? It is, so don't try to understand it now. This typical day applies to most of us: Executive, manager, union worker, stay-at-home mom, student, and retired persons, but with differing emphasis for each.

The mind map shows six parts to each day. Daily, we need to be ready for each to prevent events from leading, stressing, and overwhelming us.

1. Start
2. Surprise
3. Imposed
4. Initiate
5. Prepare
6. Act

### Start

Start each day where you are and with what you have. Most of us have too much on our minds about yesterday, today's fixed

conditions, and tomorrow. Many wish today wasn't the way it is, and worry!

We clutter our minds with vague goals about what we should or could do, with incomplete ideas, and then we panic and become frustrated.

Unclutter your mind; work with a Day Timer that shows time and tasks you plan that day—meetings, calls, visits. As well, work with a project notebook; if you have an electronic Personal Data Assistant, use it. List items you would like to do *sometime*; for each, note goal, plan, estimate of time and money. Listing projects you want to do, and thinking briefly and noting what might be involved, will help remove associated stress. When a new project or idea pops in your head, note it.

The project notebook is not a *to do list*, merely projects *you might do one day*. When you are ready to work on a project, slot it in a time slot on a specific day on your Day Timer. Today you might include a part of the planning of an item from your project list, tomorrow another part, and so on.

Before you start each day, review the Day Timer and project notebook, pray, ask God to help you decide what to include on, and exclude from, your Day Timer. Ask Him to help you leave enough room to accommodate tasks others will ask you to do that day.

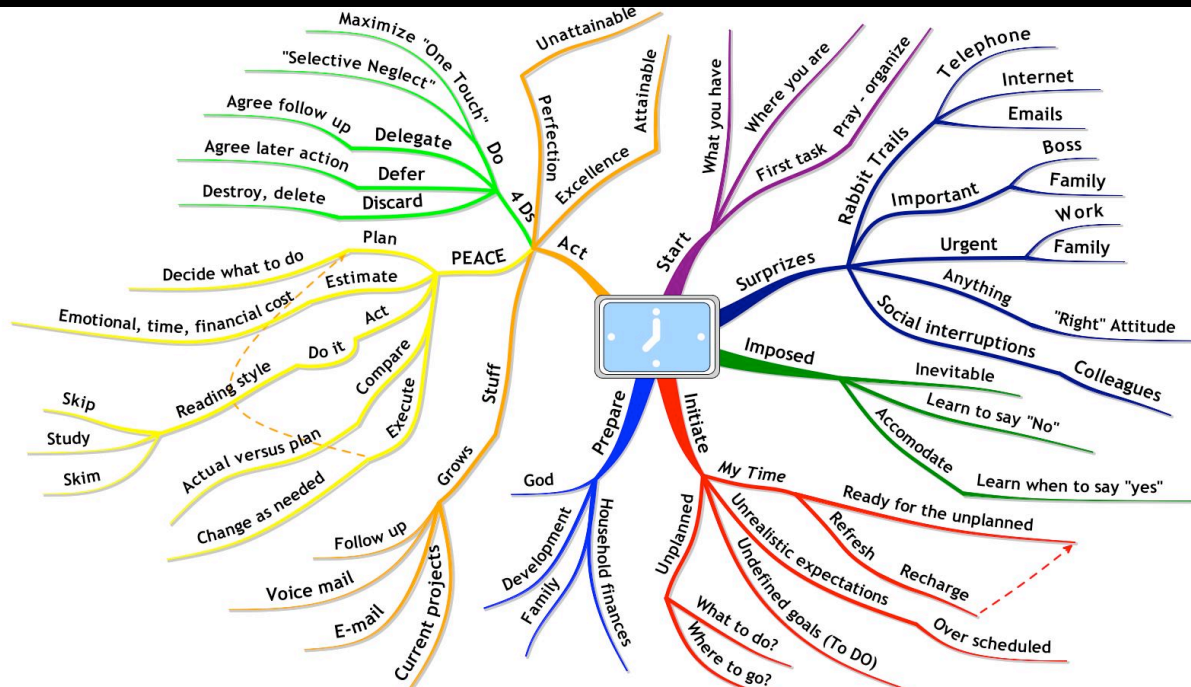
Set daily start and end times, including time for household management tasks.

### Surprise

Be realistic, expect surprises; you don't know the future. Daily, expect and learn to manage surprises from family, boss, peers. Some will be important, others urgent but unimportant, still others will be wasteful.

Become a "pearl hunter," look continually for God's plans daily. Strive for excellence, not perfection.

Learn to view events eternally. You might think you must finish a project that's due today, and you worry, become agitated and frustrated. Meanwhile, your wife calls, tells you she isn't well and *needs* you to go with her to the doctor. You talk to your boss and he agrees you need to be with your wife. So, you and he work out a plan to



handle the project (defer, delegate, drop). Suddenly, this project is no longer *as important* as you believed moments earlier! Eternal thinking gives that result.

When you say you must do a certain task at the expense of your family or your health, answer this question: If you died today, what would happen to the project?

But, the most difficult daily “surprise” to control could be your *rabbit trails* trips—diversions. You go on the Internet to read the morning paper and two hours later you are surfing, reading the latest football scores, checking your stock portfolio, reading an article on your friend's website, and so on. Watch out; e-mail-forwards, social chats, and the Internet have special *rabbit trails* that attract many “busy” folks! Sounds familiar?

When the *unexpected* crops up, look at it in context of time left that day, and then pray and ask the Lord to help you rearrange your schedule. Time is fixed, but your *attitude and behaviour* can change!

### Imposed

Some requests are inevitable. Your boss wants you to attend a meeting with him. Your husband wants you to see your daughter's teacher with her. As you plan your day, leave room not only for surprises, emergencies, but important matters that your boss, your kids and others will bring to your attention. If this doesn't happen, you get a bonus! Isn't this neat?

Learn *juggling* techniques to help deal with the unexpected. First, know when to say “yes” and when to say “no.” Some folks have great difficulty saying no, when they need to say no. So, practice.

Next, practice *selective neglect*. There is a limit to how much you can do daily. As imposed tasks arise, review the day's plans to see how these new tasks fit. If needed, reset your priorities.

Decide how to *neglect* items you can't do today, and how to *disappoint* affected persons. If you need to work late to complete an important task and this will cause you to miss a meeting at church, as early as possible, call the church and tell them you can't attend. If you prepared a presentation, decide how another person could do it, or defer it to a specific date. After, move on; don't worry about it. If you don't practice selective neglect, you will try to do everything and end up being ineffective, stressed, unreliable,

constantly late, always complaining about your busyness. Your ineffectiveness should disqualify you from leadership.

Practice selective neglect daily. When you start your day, look over the upcoming week to see whether you need to decide then to neglect meetings, or other tasks. Be proactive, early, identify events to defer or discard, and then act showing God's grace.

### Initiate

Even getting through events you planned could challenge you. On your Day Timer, you might have listed items from your project list without thinking of the full implications. Maybe you plan to start working on a presentation for an upcoming meeting. When you start, you realize you need research information, but you aren't ready to start that research. Or, you haven't decided the topics to research. Many folks don't prepare adequately. Some don't prepare, they blame busyness for their sloppiness!

Then again, you might not have thought about a meeting you were to chair. You didn't prepare, and so you set unrealistic expectations for the meeting's result.

Most folks don't plan *My-Time*, down time alone to review the morning, afternoon, or day's events to see how you did. This idea I introduced in *Managing God's Time* helps me daily to step back from the *hustle* to look at the big picture, to look away from my preoccupations, to breathe deeply, to re energize before I resume my regular activity. I do anything to take me away from ongoing tasks—walk, listen to music, play golf, sing, laugh. This is when I see my over-scheduling and try to do something about it.

At midday, go for a stroll, a jog, any activity other than your work routines. Five to fifteen minutes will work wonders.

### Prepare

Many folks overlook this area: Time to prepare for meetings, telephone calls, visits, presentations, personal, professional, career development, all to improve personal effectiveness.

We must set aside time to attend a seminar, a lecture, a training course, read a professional journal. As well, to remove worry and stress, we need to plan time for *household operations management* such as handling household finances.

These activities need time slots on our Day Timers. To our detriment, often we neglect preparation time to prepare to teach

a Bible study, work on a presentation, and do other stuff. Sadly, we use “busy” to deflect from the real issue: we over-committed!

But the most significant daily preparation time is the least obvious: Time with the Lord, praying and studying the Bible. This time helps us draw closer to Him, so we get to know His will.

Many Christians live in silos with separate compartments for home, church, work, and so on. They don’t realize God wants each of us in a personal relationship with Him in which we seek to know Him, and know His will for each day. Second Peter 1:3 tells us that He has given us everything we need for life and Godliness.

When we live lives surrendered to Christ and move away from the selfish North American Christianity, our quiet time with Him will focus on God, not on us, our prayers will focus on God (as He taught the disciples in Matthew 6:9-15), our request will be for His will and not our wish. Then we will be able to hear His goals for the day, and see His path to get to them.

## Act

Let’s look at the main source of stuff you will deal with, apart from areas addressed earlier. I lump them in the “in-basket.”

- ◆ Voice Mail
- ◆ E-mail
- ◆ Project Lists
- ◆ Tickler

To help minimize stress, we need to learn to apply effective tools and attitudes. In *Managing Gods Time*, chapter three, I discuss a protocol to handle voice and e-mails. Here, I will mention briefly the *tickler file*, which I have used for many years. Simply, it’s a physical folder with 31 sections, one for each day, to put date-sensitive documents you want to look at later. If you plan to call your insurance company on 15 October to discuss your policy, you could put the policy and notes in the “15” section. Daily, look in the section of the folder for that day to review needed actions.

The tickler file is one tool to help you stop worrying about what’s ahead. That said, apply these two essential attitudes to stuff in your in-basket: PEACE and 4Ds.

- ◆ **Plan** for a specific period, to do precise goals.
- ◆ **Estimate** and record the cost and needed sacrifices to do those goals.
- ◆ **Act** on the plan and record results as you do those goals.
- ◆ **Compare** actual steps and sacrifices with estimate as you move to the goals.
- ◆ **Execute** needed behaviour changes to do the goals.

As stuff comes to you, place them in an *in-basket* that you look at daily. As you review each document or task in the in-basket, think about its goal—what to do, or where to go. After, use PEACE: spend a few minutes thinking about the *plan* and *estimate*, before jumping in! As Jesus said in Luke 14:28, “count the cost” before building your tower! As you work on each plan, check how you are doing and change your behaviour as needed.

Daily, set aside one to two hours *when you are alert*, to go through your in-basket. *This is your meeting* to review mails (documents, email, voicemail, everything that need your attention), and to prepare for meetings and presentations. You are not available, and must not be disturbed! Go to a meeting room, stay home, hire a baby-sitter, go anywhere quiet. Don’t answer the phone!

As you go through your in-basket, *apply one* of these four actions:

- ◆ **Do**
  - ◆ Use PEACE here. Practice the “*One Touch Principle*”: try to dispose of everything the first time you see it; that’s the goal. Think like a golfer who wants to minimize putts! If the item needs less than a few (two to three minutes), handle it now. If not, apply another action.
- ◆ **Delegate**
  - ◆ Be a leader; train someone to do what you do. Stay-at-home moms train the kids. If you have nobody, then you are it! Where a qualified person is available, including someone *you might think* less qualified than you, give her responsibility and authority to do the job. Set boundaries, review parameters, and in the tickler file, note follow up needed. It’s worth the time to train someone to whom you can delegate. Learn to give up your “electric trains” (your favourite tasks).
- ◆ **Defer**
  - ◆ This is not procrastination! Some items can and should wait for a *later specific time*. Put these items in the tickler file for a specific date—budget data for next month’s meeting. Later, the second touch, dispose of it, don’t defer it!
- ◆ **Discard**
  - ◆ You got a business card at lunch. Enter it in your address book and then discard it. Don’t leave it in your in-basket. So too with a dinner invitation. Look at your calendar, spend two minutes reflecting, and then say yes or no. If you need to consult someone, set a time, and then put the invitation in the tickler file. If yes, note the appointment, and then discard the letter. If it has needed information, note the information in your Day Timer and place the letter in your tickler file for a specific date. If you say no, discard the card.

## Summary

In North America, many churches and Christian ministries encourage a selfish lifestyle, which promotes silo living that produces stress as we spend time trying to get God to do what we want! Examine your attitude to work. If you think work is drudgery, you will be unhappy, stressed, and unfulfilled. Ask God to help you change it. Meanwhile, learn *selective neglect, one touch principle*, and practice PEACE and the *four action Ds*.

The six parts of your day are predicable. Accept them, grow in them, learn from them, rejoice in them! When you turn over all areas of your life to Jesus, you will be able to see and do His plans. He hasn’t promised that everything will be good according to your standards, so you will have bad days as you wrestle with doing His will. Study this excerpt from Dr. Henry and Richard Blackaby’s 10 October devotional, *Experiencing God Day-by-Day* ([www.blackaby.org](http://www.blackaby.org)):

“There is much discussion these days about leaders and managers. According to popular teaching, leaders have the vision and set goals for people or organizations to follow. Managers handle the day-to-day marshaling of resources under their charge. In the Christian life, God is the leader of our lives, our families, and our churches. God sets the direction; He establishes the priorities; He provides the resources. We are the managers. We take what He gives us and do with it as He directs.”