

Making Lists

by Kirsty O'Callaghan

I love this topic, especially because I am a compulsive list maker. I have an overall to do list, a daily to do list, a grocery list, a who to ring list, a who to email list, a to do for work list, a to do for home and family list, lists in my diary, list for gifts, to do lists for other members of the family, and the list goes on.

I would like to think this makes my life easier, it feels like it does most of the time. I would also like to think I am a compulsive list maker and doer, rather than just a list maker. I often hear a lot of people profess to the later.

So why does making to do lists work and how can we make them work for us?

One of my favourite things to ask myself numerous amounts of time during the day is:

“What is the best use of my time right now?”

When I have asked myself this question, it is an opportunity to look at my list and see what I could be doing in the time I have right now and the energy I have available to me.

This is especially helpful to me as I have three children, work commitments, a wonderful group of friends and a husband, all of whom I like to attempt to share my time and energy with equally. I am also house proud and tend to be a perfectionist and value ‘my time’. As you may now be seeing, without my lists I can very easily be distracted and taken off task, only to feel later that I let someone down or loose the sense of achievement I get from getting the right things done in the right order.

When creating my lists I have one that has everything on it. I sit down and randomly write down all the things I need and want to be doing. I will also add to these at anytime, when I think of something so I do not forget.

I will point out here, that I have said “need and want.” I am always aware that there are things I need to do, but may not necessarily want to do and things I want to do, but may not need to.

To me both are of equal importance. This is mainly due to the fact that the things I need to do (for example washing, cleaning, tedious work requirements etc) and the things I want to do (for example being creative personally and professionally, spending time with family, ringing or seeing friends etc,) when completed leave me with an equal sense of satisfaction and completion.

Once I have this list together, I prioritise tasks. This means looking at:

- When it has to be done by?
- When would be the most appropriate time of day for me to do it?
- How long it will take?

Not everything gets put in my diary. There are things that just stay on list and I do if I have spare time during a day that I can do it.

If you are finding it difficult to prioritise, one of the solutions I find helpful is listing everything, then down the right hand side next to item put date to be finished or score the task. That way I'm prioritising by when the item is required to be done.

An example of "scoring the task" is to give an item a 1 if it must be done within a day or a 5 if it can wait but you would like to get done in the next week or so. Once you have done this, you can transfer into diary appropriately or re-write your list with 1's at top through to 5's down the bottom. Remember to tick off as you get done, and as the days go by update priorities.

Once transferred into my diary for daily execution, if I do not get the task done on that day, I transfer over to next day and attempt to complete it then.

Every weekend my family and I create a list of tasks that we commit to getting done. It stays centrally in home and when done it is ticked off.

This allows us to not only be task orientated and working as a team, each with our own areas of responsibility, it also gives us quality time together not worrying about rushing home, or to the office to get things completed. My children also know that if their tasks aren't completed they cannot go off to play until they are.

You can also create checklists for various tasks, which I find invaluable due to the ease of task completion and nothing is forgotten.

I have checklists for work tasks and even a camping checklist of what to take. You can get moving checklists, information checklists and many more or make your own.

Lists can really assist in overcoming a lot of negative emotions and self put downs when tasks are forgotten or not completed. Lists can also assist in managing feelings of being overwhelmed or unfocused or even forgetfulness.

I like hand writing mine, but you can put on computer, type out, use your organizer or even mobile phone. Most importantly though, lists allow

another way of giving you a big pat on the back when you look back over your day and really see what you have achieved.

In closing a thought for your consideration:

“Set peace of mind as your highest goal and organize your life around it”. - Brian Tracy

Coaching Exercises for Your Consideration

- Try a potential simple list first. On a piece of paper, write down the left hand side the numbers 1, 2 and 3 in descending order. Now, select three things that you want to achieve today. You have the choice of listing them as your first, second and third priority or simply look at the list in total as the three things you’re committing to getting achieved, regardless of the order in which they are completed.
- At the beginning of each day, create a list of what you want to achieve. You can prioritise the list in order in which they need to get done, or you can mark them 1, 2 or 3 based on their priority (1’s are high priority, 2’s are medium and 3’s are low). As you complete the items, “tick” them off the list. At the end of the day, review your list and celebrate the achievement of accomplishing all that you have. Then, at the beginning of the next day, carry over to a new list anything from the previous list that you didn’t complete. If something what a 2 or a 3 before, but now is a 1, be sure to re-score the item on your list.
- Consider a goal you have, and create a list of the steps you need to take, in order, in which to achieve the goal. If it’s a big goal, then there may be smaller goals which make up the big goal, and therefore maybe each of the smaller goals needs its own list. If there are “milestone” moments on the road to achieving your goal, then you may want to insert a “task” after each milestone to celebrate that milestone achievement.
- Consider how you could use technology to assist you with your list management. For example, if you use the email program “Outlook”, then you may want to create you list in the tasks section of the application, which also allows you to include due dates and calendar reminders. You may be using your Outlook, or other email program’s calendar function, to schedule the actual block of time you’re going to perform the tasks on your list. There are many options here to explore.
- Interview someone you know who uses lists, and have them teach you their method. This doesn’t mean you need to adopt their method for yourself, but you may find that parts of their method may suit you, your style and your needs quite well.



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