

Time management – I CARE for my time

“We all have 24 hours in the day. You choose your priorities.”

Greg Habstritt, multi-millionaire

Here we will address 5 simple steps to time management. Having a rich, full, balanced, satisfying life is all about which activities you choose to do during the day, week, month or year. We will follow the **I CARE** system ([review](#)) for time management.

Step One: Identify what is important to you

The first step really is to identify what is important to you. I addressed how to do that last month in the [article](#) “Be Happy – Identify your Destination.” You can choose to do that at any scale. Start with the largest block of time that makes sense to you. Perhaps it might be a year. Go through the 5 steps to identify your goals for the year. Consider your whole life and identify everything you think is important to you – your health, your family, your career, your hobbies and so on.

Your goals will tend to fall into three categories.

- A) Timed activities: monthly or weekly activities, such as “spend at least one weekend every month out of town on vacation,” or “date night with hubby.”
- B) Lifestyle habits: “stay organized.”
- C) Things you want to achieve, such as “Organize the house this year so I can find anything I'm looking for in less than 1 minute.” (Remember to make them SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Result-driven, Time-constrained.)

Remember to prioritize your goals.

Step two: Categorize and decide how much time you are willing to spend on each priority

There's no hard and fast rule here. Judge for yourself what proportion of your time you want to spend on each priority. Consider the amount of effort you want to put into each goal and make a guess as to what seems appropriate. If you find that you are “running out of time,” either adjust the times allocated for the higher priority tasks, or ask yourself if you *really* want to complete the lower priority goals you are working on. Remember that most tasks will fill the allotted time. So if you allow yourself 4 hours to answer emails each day, it will probably take 4 hours. If you only allow an hour, it will only take an hour. Now put blocks of time into your calendar corresponding to each priority. If you have items that will take less than one hour to complete, group them together with other short items into one block. For instance, set aside a time in your day to return all your phone calls.

Step three: Assign a home by create a structure for completing your goals

The best home for the tasks you identify is in your calendar. Decide when you will complete each task and put it in your calendar. If you don't have a calendar, use one! Either online or paper – which ever suits your lifestyle and habits.

Repeat this step for each of your goals, ensuring that you start with the highest priority activities and goals first and work your way down to the lowest priority goals.

Put Category A goals, timed activities, straight into your calendar.

For Category B goals, lifestyle habits, consider what you need to do to support you in fulfilling those goals. For “stay organized,” for instance, you might decide to open your mail every day. Put some time into your calendar for opening mail every day. The aim here is not to timetable every little thing that you do, rather, to make sure that you have time for the things you have deemed a priority.

Category C goals, things you want to achieve, need to be broken down into smaller chunks. For each goal, repeat steps 1 through 3 using smaller and smaller time blocks until you have your major goals scheduled in your calendar. For each successive time block, concentrate on what you will do for the next smaller time frame.

Let's examine a Category C example. You start with a year and you have a goal to have your house organized by the end of the year. You decide you are willing to allocate one afternoon a week to the project. Follow step 1 again within that goal. You decide that you have four main areas that need attention in the following order of priority – the home office, the bedrooms, the kitchen, and photos. Since these items can be done one after the other, and you decide that is the way you want to do it (so you can reward yourself for completing a goal and motivate yourself to complete the others!) rather than have all four projects stretch out over time. You decide that you will complete organizing the home office in the next three months. This is still too big of a chunk to handle in one go, so you go back to step one and break down organizing the home office into the following three tasks: paper management, computer management, and organizing supplies. Paper management is still a big task for you, so in the next month, you choose to work on the following four tasks: create a home for the incoming papers and tasks, purge the filing cabinet, re-vamp your filing system, and purge and sort the piles of papers on your desk into the new filing system now with plenty of space. Now, schedule “creating a home for your incoming papers and tasks” into your calendar for this week on the afternoon you have allocated for “organizing your home”.

Step 4: Retrievability

Ensure your calendar is easily accessible and make a habit to refer to it several times a day.

Step 5: Easily maintain your plan

Make sure you have scheduled time into your calendar to plan. If you have created plans for 1 year out, 3 months out, 1 month out, 1 week out and tomorrow, you will need to schedule time every day to plan for tomorrow, every week to plan for the next week, every month to plan for the next month, every 3 months to plan for the next 3 months and every year to plan for the next year.

If you are not in the habit of planning, this may sound like a lot, but as you get used to doing it, you can use the work you have previously done as the skeleton for the next time period so you have less to do the next time. Planning for the next day should take 5 – 15 minutes at the end of your day.

A colleague of mine, Donna McMillan, performed an informal experiment. She asked 5 of her clients to take 30 minutes to plan at the end of the day for the next day and she asked another 5 clients to plan in the morning. The 5 clients who planned the night before were off running first thing the next day.

The 5 who waited until the morning to plan spent half their morning just figuring out what it was they were supposed to be doing.

So, to summarize, apply the I CARE system to your time:

Identify your goals

Categorize and define

Assign homes – schedule your activities

Retrieve – keep your calendar handy

Easily maintain – plan to plan

Now, all the planning in the world won't get you the results you want. Now you need to follow your plan. Take the actions required and you will experience the results. Use the record of your life having achieved your goals that you created when you created your goals as motivation. Use rewards and disincentives if you have to. Use whatever works for you! And if it stops working, change the rewards or disincentives.

Welcome to your life following your passions and fulfilling your dreams!

Katherine Macey is the founder of **Organize to Excel**, a professional organizing business dedicated to helping you manage your time and space so you can follow your passions and fulfill your dreams. Contact Katherine (katherine@organizetoexcel.com) now to identify how **Organize to Excel** can best support you in following YOUR passions and fulfilling YOUR dreams.