



As a full-time student, wife, and mother of 5... There are certainly moments when I feel like my plate is so full, that at any given moment, stuff is going to fall off the edges. Do you ever feel like your list of daily responsibilities is so long, that you don't even know where to start? Do you find that you are always busy, but never seem to make tangible progress? I know that personally, I can answer yes to all these questions at times. It's during these times, I have to get organized, which is not something that comes natural to me. That's why I created a tool (the spreadsheet you see above) for helping me to be more effective at managing my time. Guess what I found out as a result? I am NOT the world's lousiest housekeeper, I DON'T need to be Wonderwoman, and I CAN be the ruler of my daily responsibilities, instead of them ruling me!

I am not a type-A, naturally organized personality. I have to really WORK at being organized. So when you are reading the following steps, thinking, "I could never get THAT organized"... Yes you can! I will let you in on a little secret. I was voted "biggest slob" in my high school year book. I have since risen above that horrible label, to effectively co-manage my household of 7 on a daily basis. When I follow the steps below, my house is cleaner, I have more time for fun with the kids, more free time (yes there IS such a thing!), I am more confident in my role as a wife and mom, and my husband is a happier man!

I am going to show you 10 simple steps that will help you organize your time so that you can accomplish more, have more free time, and have something to SHOW for all your hard work!

You can DO it! Here's how:

1) Make a Calendar: The spreadsheet you see above is one that I made using MS Excel. There are lots of other methods (like a wall calendar, personal planner, dry-erase board, or good old-fashioned pen & paper) that you can use, depending on your preference, personality, and available resources. You can set up your calendar with a daily, weekly or monthly format. I prefer a weekly format, since my family's scheduling sometimes varies week to week-- and daily scheduling is too much work for me :-). Decide what time you want to get up every day (and set an alarm for yourself, like it's a job-- because it IS!), and what time you want to go to bed.

2) Make a list of what I call "External" responsibilities. These are things you have to do OUTSIDE your home. Included on this list, should be things like appointments, shopping trips, school events, errand running, etc. Anything that you have to do, that requires you to leave home. If there are specific dates/times scheduled for the items, write that date/time/location info next to the item.

3) Make a list of your "Internal" responsibilities. On this list should be everything you do at home, to maintain the cleanliness, comfort, and continuity of your household. For example, meal prep, laundry, dish washing, vacuuming, bathroom cleanup, kids' bedtime routine, lawn/garden maintenance, bill paying, etc. For the purpose of not forgetting anything, go ahead and pretend that you are Wonderwoman/Superman, and include EVERYTHING you'd do at home, if you could get to it.

4) Look at the list you made in step #3. Does it include personal time, and time with your spouse? If not, write it in! Making time to maintain your personal sanity, as well as nurturing your marriage and/or close personal relationships are way more important than whether or not the trash goes out-- yet they seem to be at the bottom of the priority list (if they are on the list at all!) This brings me to my next point:

5) Prioritize the items on that list, in numbered order of importance, with 1 being the most important. For household chores, you might consult with your spouse on this, if you have one-- and ask which chores are most important to him/her to have done on a regular basis. If your hubby is someone who hates to see dishes piled up, making dishes a high priority will eliminate that stress from your marriage.

6) Begin filling in your calendar, with items from the list you made in step #2. These go in first because they are often scheduled for specific dates and times and are non-negotiable.

7) Once your external responsibilities are on your calendar, begin scheduling your internal household responsibilities. Start with 1 hour of personal time per week. SCHEDULE it in, and make it non-negotiable. For that one hour per week, you can do whatever you want. Next, schedule an hour per week of relationship maintenance time. If you are married, use this time to go on a date with your spouse, or have that conversation you've been meaning to have. Just make sure that you consult your spouse and schedule it for a time that works with their schedule too. If you aren't married, call up a friend and talk on the phone, go out for coffee, do something relational & REAL (getting on Facebook doesn't count!)

8) This is the most time-consuming step, but it is the one that will give you the greatest results! Put the rest of the items from your list (from step 3) on the calendar. For household chores, look at the order of priority. Some things will need to be done daily (like the kids' bedtime routine, meals, etc.). For the other things, decide how often you'd like to get them done. Be realistic. If your spouse hates dirty dishes, schedule dish duty every day, for a half hour after your scheduled meal. Some things, like laundry-- you can choose to do daily for a shorter block of time, or save it up and use a bigger block of time-- just one or two days per week. If there are chores you dislike a lot, schedule them on a day when you don't have much else scheduled for. That way, you will actually look forward to the "easy" days when all you have to do is the one thing you aren't super fond of. When everything is scheduled, look over your calendar and see how much unscheduled time is left. Pretty surprising, huh? Schedule in a couple blocks of time each week, for unexpected events. That way, if talkative Aunt Betty calls, or you have a plumbing problem-- you won't blow your whole schedule. When you end up doing unexpected things, write them on your calendar, into the time slot they fell into, and move the scheduled task (if there was one there) from that time slot, to another free slot.

9) Make a "wish" list of long-term projects you'd like to get done. This could include projects you started but never finished, and/or things you'd like to do someday. Either write the list on your calendar (in a margin), or on a separate sheet of paper posted right next to your calendar. When you have unscheduled blocks of time, begin whittling away at this list. Write in any work you do toward these projects-- into the time-slots that you used to work on them. Cross them off as they are accomplished.

10) Post your calendar in a place where you will look at it early and often. I keep mine on the side of my fridge. When you get up in the morning (don't forget to set your alarm!), look at what's scheduled for the day. If your carpet is filthy but it's not on the list for today, IGNORE it... You will get to vacuum it tomorrow when it's scheduled. This will save you from the mental burden of feeling like you have to do EVERYTHING, every day. Do what's on your schedule. If you get that done early, and you want to do more, go for it! You will be amazed at how freeing it is, to accomplish exactly what you have set out for yourself. Also, you will have a written record of everything you did during the course of a day, which is very gratifying.

Over time, if you are like me, you will get into a routine, and you will stop looking at the schedule so much. Eventually, if you find that you are back to feeling totally overwhelmed... It is probably time to re-visit your schedule, or make adjustments to it. Life happens, so don't beat yourself up if you fail to accomplish what's on your schedule for a given day-- just reschedule it. However, if you find this happening often-- you should evaluate what's keeping you from getting things done (what are you doing during that time instead of what's scheduled), and give it its own time slot so it won't keep you from accomplishing your daily tasks.

I hope this helps you as much as it has helped me.

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