

Breaking Free of Inertia – Why and How to Stay on Schedule

Being natural bodies, we fall under the power of inertia.

When we're working, really working, we're often energized and propelled by seeing progress, making small accomplishments, checking items off our to-do list, knowing that we're finally moving in the right direction. We want to keep going to see bigger victories and reach the end of a project or mission. At least we want to finish something, some stage of work, so we can move on and not have to come back to it later.

If you were writing a report or email when someone yelled "quitting time," would you stop in the middle of a word, or say "okay, just let me finish this sentence"? (And you'd probably keep going at least to the end of the paragraph!) If you were wiping a counter and saw food dribbled down the cabinet front, you'd wipe that too, and then seeing some on the floor you would clean that up too, which would lead you to see the pet's empty water bowl which happens to be in need of washing before filling. While you might be thinking "when will I ever be done!?!?" you would keep going because you are in motion and one thing leads to another.

When we're at rest, we feel like staying at rest, either because we've worn ourselves way down with our overly long work sessions, and/or because it's easier to dream than to act. It's easier to worry and procrastinate than to get the blood flowing through our muscles and brains. Just thinking of all the work we have to do makes us feel tired and lost. We want another hour of rest before facing what feels like a losing battle with life. (Hint: when we have a schedule, we don't always have to think about all of our work—usually only the next thing on the schedule.)

When we are working there are always more things to do. When we are resting there are always other positions to roll into, limbs to stretch or retract, dreams to be watched.

But we are not only natural bodies. We are also spiritual beings inhabiting our bodies like exosuits. And it is supposed to be our spirits in control of our bodies. We are supposed to choose what's wise and make ourselves enact wisdom. Wisdom doesn't rely solely on willpower—it adds strategic management.

One of the delights in being self-employed is supposed to be the freedom to work when we want to, and not when we don't want to. But that is only viable once we learn to value work and know how to motivate and schedule ourselves.

If left to my own tendencies I would probably have a 34 hour day/night cycle, but God only designed a 24 hour cycle for us. I believe He had reasons.

I've discovered that working to the end of one project, while other things pile up, collapsing in exhaustion and resting until bed-ache or an outside force (or family member) demands wakefulness, and

then tackling another mountain of work of one sort other until that pile's cleared away, is NOT efficient—or healthy.

You might think for instance, washing dishes only once per week would be more efficient than washing after every meal. That not thinking about laundry until you had a washer-worth of each type (lights, darks, reds, whites) would let you focus on other things for a week or two. That piling up unsorted receipts, and sorting out accounting and taxes all at once annually would be most efficient. Wrong, wrong, and wrong.

While there are sometimes real advantages to grouping work into batches, cutting down on time required to get things in and out and switch mental gears from one task to another, this definition of efficiency has to be kept in check. There can also be a disadvantage we should examine—the ripple effect on life flow.

Cooking and serving in the second half of the week may take longer and be far more frustrating when the most appropriate dishes are in the dirty pile from three days before, and are filling up half of the available counter space. Picking out an appropriate outfit for your day may also take longer and be less satisfactory when most of your clothes are dirty and waiting for that one big laundry day. Finding time for several days of sorting, categorizing, and adding up income and expenses can not only be hard, but it also means pushing a week's worth of everything else off track every Spring.

You'll also find that you work smarter, think clearer and faster, and feel more cheerful and creative when you go to sleep before you're on the verge of illness, and get a sensible amount of sleep at least several nights per week.

So we need a schedule where everything gets done when it's best for the flow of everything else. A little of this and a little of that, to keep every department of our lives running well. If you don't believe me, try imagining the only grocery store in town saying that it's more efficient to restock everything at once. What if they didn't care that half of the shelves were empty and you couldn't buy what you wanted, because there was still half a store's worth of something for sale? And then what if everyone had to wait outside in line for three days while the whole store was restocked at once? This is an example of the ripple effect "efficiency" can have on the rest of life flow. It can be very inefficient for everything it touches.

The surprising part is that we will find that we seem to have more time—enough time—when we both have a good plan, and stick to it. That's because we won't be wasting time in confusion, frustration, and depression. You probably don't know how much time those negatives take until you free yourself from them.

If your life is complex or you have many responsibilities, you may find it hard to make a plan or schedule which you can stick to. It takes thought over a period of time, and trial and error. Be willing to adjust when you find what won't work.

I think my biggest problems with scheduling were being unrealistic with how fast I could work, not planning bumper time (for interruptions, bathroom trips, switching between tasks, etc), no allotment for the unexpected, and leaving no time for catching up when a project or chore didn't fit its time slot. For years I refused to make a realistic schedule because I refused to accept it might take years to do as much as I wanted to accomplish in months. But I've found a time saver—a magic way to get more out of each day.

What's important is to accept when you've found a workable schedule or plan, and then "just do it!" Know when to stop thinking thoughts like, "I wish I had a plan," "I just don't know how to get it all done," "I'll have to give up some sleep."

"Just do it" saves time. I'll explain.

When you hear "stick to the plan" I'm sure that triggers the protest that our plans can't take into consideration the unknown future, so we're bound to have to go with the flow and that means we'll get behind again, so no schedule is going to work. That's what I used to think. However I've learned that the best defense here is to swap. For example, if you've scheduled an afternoon at the computer and your spouse invites you out on a date or your kid gets sick, tend to the family today but make sure you reschedule (and accomplish) that afternoon worth of computer work on the next day where you had intended family time. But only swap when it's wise to, not when your whim dictates.

So I'll say it again: once you have a workable schedule, just do it! Whether you feel like it or not, you can just do it. Do what your plan calls for, when it calls for it. If you're scheduled to load the washer tonight, do it. Don't say to yourself, "oh I know I'm supposed to wash laundry, but I have clothes for tomorrow and I just want to go to bed. It will be okay." You could have done it in the same time it took you to debate and excuse yourself. Stay on track and you'll feel incredibly energized! Telling yourself "Just do it!" is like revving your own engine—you'll go farther faster. You'll rest better knowing you're on track, and wake up happier knowing your not starting the day behind on your chores.

Once you have a good schedule, you won't have to constantly waste time thinking about what you're forgetting to do, trying to figure out where to start, calculating what will happen if you put something off, and wallowing in negative thoughts.

Every time you "just do it" you find out you can do it, which makes you feel like you can do anything. And you can. Without wasting energy and time thinking and rethinking the routine and mundane, you'll have more time and energy for bigger and better things. After a while your schedule will become habitual, and that will free up even more time and energy for whatever you choose.

ANOTHER TIP: Once you have scheduled time periods for each type of work, be thoughtful to choose the most important or forward-moving activity for that category. For instance, if you've allotted one hour with your child, which adds most to the quality of your relationship: passively watching a TV show together, or interacting imaginatively with action figures? If you only have an hour per week for social media, decide which will move you closer to your goal: to write a blog post, browse other people's

FaceBook pages, Tweet encouraging responses to other people, search for an ezine which might publish your article, or what? Accept the length of time you have for a type of work, and focus on using that time slot wisely.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven . . .” (Ecclesiastes 3). It’s our job to discipline ourselves to do the right things at the right times.

