

# ORGANIZING

## Prevent a cluttered calendar: Just say 'No'

Anyone who knows me well might be laughing that I am writing an article about saying "No." I frequently talk about the need to decline commitments that don't support my priorities.

But honestly, the reality is that I talk a good game, but I often overcommit. I am terrible at saying "No." My family knows this all too well. I have a "Stop me before I volunteer again" refrigerator magnet that Eric bought me years ago, hoping it would help. I must confess that too often, I don't heed it.

Angie Hyche

I believe that organizing our time is the most important organizing we need to do. We all have the same amount of time each day. We all have numerous responsibilities and lead busy lives.

The choices we make about how to spend that time are critical. If we don't make those choices thoughtfully and carefully, we can end up with an overloaded schedule and its resultant stress.

The most important principle in making decisions about our time is to consider our priorities. What is important to you? What are you most passionate about? What kind of legacy do you want to leave? These big life questions require deep contemplation.

I realized recently that one of the reasons I stayed constantly busy is that I was avoiding these tough questions. It was easier to just keep going, running from one activity to the next.

But my busyness had such an adverse effect on my family and on my emotional health that I was forced to confront these questions. It has been well worth the time I have spent in reflection, and I am getting better at making sensible choices about my time.

I recently watched an interview between writer and life coach Marie Forleo and author and time management expert Laura Vanderkam (watch it on YouTube at <https://bit.ly/2HGemS8>).

Vanderkam has written several best-selling books on time management, including "What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast" and "168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think." During the interview, Vanderkam remarked that we tend to have more trouble saying "No" if the



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event is several weeks or months away. Because we don't have as many time commitments that far in advance, it's as if we think our future self will have a completely free calendar.

Logically we know that by the time that event rolls around, our calendar will be much more full. But for now, it's far too easy to say "Yes."

Vanderkam gives some excellent advice for viewing future commitments, advising us to ask ourselves if we would say "Yes" to this same activity if it were scheduled for tomorrow. It's very likely we already have plans for tomorrow and would have to reschedule something. If the opportunity was a perfect one, we might be willing to do that.

But if it's something about which we're wouldn't consider changing our schedule to include it. If we feel reluctant or indecisive about it now, we will feel the same way about it weeks or months from now. So the best option is to go ahead and say "No" now.

An excerpt from Derek Sivers' book "Anything You Want" explains well the reasoning that can help you make rational decisions about upcoming commitments. Sivers asserts that if we can't give an enthusiastic "Yes" to something, our answer should be "No." If we feel "anything less than 'Wow!' That would be amazing! Absolutely!" then we should say "No." If we are saying "No" to most things, it frees us up to say "Yes" to the things we really want to do. Think about this reasoning every time you're invited to an event or asked to start a project. If your answer isn't an enthusiastic "Yes," say "No."

Obviously there are limits to this strategy. We can't say "No" to everything we aren't enthusiastic about. After all, someone has to wash the dishes, do the laundry and scrub the toilet. And we can't just say "No" to a task that our boss asks us to do that is in line with our responsibilities. What I'm referring to in this article are optional activities, ones in which we have free choice.

One of my favorite songs is "Stop This Train" by John Mayer. When my schedule is out of control, these lyrics really hit home:

*Stop this train  
I want to get off and go home again  
I can't take the speed it's moving in  
I know I can't  
But, honestly, won't someone stop this train?*

Have you ever felt this way, wishing despite the speeding train of your life? Well, I've got news for you: You are the only one who controls the speed of the train. We may like to think we are at the mercy of other's demands on us and that we don't really have control over our schedule. But our schedule is under our control. Yes, we have some commitments that we can't change, but we have much more control than we like to think we do.

Armed with deep reflection about your priorities and these pieces of advice, take a look at your calendar and your "To Do" list. Do you see an activity (or a bunch of them) that don't align with your priorities? Are there some tasks that you wish you hadn't said "Yes" to? Make some changes now to prevent stress later.

Clearly, we can't suddenly back out of everything. But there is a big difference between backing out of a commitment to a PTA luncheon next month and deserting your post at Guantanamo. If it's far enough in advance and you're not going to leave someone in a difficult position, it's OK to change your mind.

Make a pledge that starting now, you're going to be more proactive about how you spend your time. Communicate that decision to your spouse, close friends and family members. Our personal decisions about the way we spend our time have a huge effect on the people we love. If we're either too busy or too stressed over our own commitments, we're not going to be as patient, kind and giving to our loved ones as we'd like.

All right my fellow Type-A over-committed friends, are you ready to do some real soul searching? Will you really commit to saying "No" to a few things? Here's to saying "No" to a few things so that we can say "Yes" to the best things.

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