

effective environments newsletter



CONSULTANTS TO NONPROFITS, SMALL BUSINESSES & ENTREPRENEURS

What a difference a day makes!

Designing each day as author of your life

Why design a day?

If our goal is to live a conscious and intentional life — a life that WE say makes a difference, a life with a level of quality that is enriching, rewarding and worthwhile — then it follows that this achievement is not to be left to chance.

What's more, once we have designed overall annual accomplishments, and priorities for the month and the week, we are still met with the incontrovertible fact that we have ONLY TODAY in which to act. Nothing happens in life except what happens today. We can choose to have each day be satisfying, and to have it contribute to life. A key to being effective, and a significant part of authoring life, occurs in our practice of designing each day.

Living life as a creation

"Designing the day" is distinct from merely "planning the day," as plans may become rote or uni-dimensional. It is different from simply listing "everything there is to do today," as that list may be generated from reference to the

squeakiest wheels, what happens to arrive in the mail, or what lies in the topmost piles on your desk. Designing your day allows you to choose what fits and what matters — and to omit what does NOT fit. In this way, you cease to work from an impossibly long list, created with a *hope* that somehow it will all get done.

A daily design is a display of the life we mean to live today, a holographic expression of our long-term commitments to well-being, relationship, productivity and right livelihood. A daily design allows us to interrupt the habit of reacting to circumstances or handling only what is "in our face" — and to replace it with the habit of authoring life.

Each item on a daily design is selected because it forwards a commitment. Each has a direct relationship to the fulfillment of our overall accomplishments. Each is a choice. When a daily design is complete, it produces *our* definition of "a great day."

How is it done?

Creating a design for the day

begins with putting the previous day to rest — acknowledging what was and was not accomplished, making a plan for the undone, being complete with the day. We strongly recommend that you NOT design a day until you have put your previous plan or design behind you and declared yourself to be at peace with it.

You may choose to design your day first thing in the morning, last thing at night or (and this works best for many people) as the last thing you do before you leave your office for the day. Experiment until you find the time that works best for you and supports you in making this practice a habit.

Compile your design by first noting and entering your existing commitments or calendar appointments. Then, with due reference to the amount of "disposable time" the day offers, select from your Action Manager — and enter on your daily design — the actions you will take that are NOT scheduled in time. Refer to your weekly priorities and add any



Published by: effective environments • Editor: Sunny Yates • Call or e-mail us for your free subscription.
3910 N. Blackhawk Road • Silver City, NM 88061 • Tel: (505) 534-2121 • Fax: (505) 388-1016

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actions that will ensure you are on track to fulfill those priorities in a timely manner.

Tips for powerful designs

1. Design each day for accomplishment. Rather than merely listing what there is "to do," be sure that you see the connection between the actions you are taking today and the results you will accomplish this year. For any given action, identify this connection before you start work, or reconsider whether to include the action in your day at all.

2. Create parameters that work for you. Begin your design by circling (on the calendar side of your design sheet) the time when you will start work, the time when you will STOP work, and the time when you'll have lunch. THEN, schedule everything else. Your power as the author of life is enhanced when you establish these boundaries and make yourself a priority!

3. Don't put more into your daily design than will actually fit in your day — and do not start work until you are clear that you have designed a day that works. If you know in your heart that the list is too long, reschedule some items, so that you end up with a day that is do-able. You may choose to number your action items, ranking them in order of importance, and then to work on them in that order. Or, you may choose to asterisk the three to five items you'll focus on today "no matter what." It is key that you have a way to focus on what matters, to feel you can win at the day you've designed and to ensure that you

experience genuine fulfillment at the day's end.

4. Leave room in your day for the unexpected, especially if it is your job to respond to requests throughout the day!

5. Include actions that nurture and support you and the people around you. Add some physical activity, send a card to a friend, buy yourself a flower. This (today) IS your life! Have it be whole and enriching.

How to work from your design

The purpose of your design is to provide focus and to guide actions, while allowing you to hold and be responsible for what is not getting done. Keep your design in front of you throughout the day, choose your actions based on your schedule and your commitments, and use a highlighter to mark over your accomplishments as they are completed.

If your day does not go as designed, because unexpected opportunities intervene, include the new opportunities (and add them to your design). Then, reschedule the actions that will NOT be completed today. In this manner, your day is — at all times — do-able, and you ensure that you have a plan for the things that are not being done today.

Conclusion

Your daily design will not replace creativity, flexibility or spontaneity. It *will* give you peace of mind and a framework within which to author life and to produce the outcomes you are committed to.

We invite you to experiment with this powerful technology and discover a new level of effectiveness and enjoyment in life!

"Life is what happens to us while we're making other plans."

-- John Lennon

Calendar Savvy

If you find yourself forgetting or missing appointments, double-scheduling yourself, or simply feeling overwhelmed, consider these suggestions:

1. Use only one calendar --- you have only one life! Using more than one calendar takes more time and management to update and it's easier to forget something important.

2. Schedule appointments in pencil. Changes made in ink lead to messy — and even illegible — calendars.

3. Use your calendar **ONLY** for appointments in time. Don't use your calendar for notes (such as directions to meetings, agenda issues, etc.) or actions to take.

4. Throw old calendar pages away or, if they are truly needed for records, file them rather than carrying them around.

5. Remember that every entry in your calendar is a choice, and each choice is a part of your daily design. Practice designing days that delight and fulfill you.