

# Creating "White Space" in Your Life

By Kathy Paauw

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Henry Kissinger once said, "There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full." If you can relate to his comment, this newsletter is for you...

Look at your appointment book. See any "white space" there?

If you're like most busy executives and professionals, you are booked solid. In between appointments, you struggle to catch up with projects, reports, reading, phone calls, correspondence, e-mail, etc. With the pace you keep, you probably feel fatigued...like you're running on empty.

This can wreak havoc on your business or career, as well as your personal life. Consider these common symptoms of fatigue:

- Lack of motivation and energy
- Irritability
- Reduced productivity
- Reduced efficiency and effectiveness
- Reduced quality / increased mistakes
- Stressed relationships

You may be unaware of how run down you are becoming. Perhaps you have bought into the old adage that "time equals money." If spending more time at the office equated to making more money, we could all retire early!

By now you've figured out that more time at the office does not necessarily equate to more or better results. In fact, it often means fewer results and more mistakes.

The vast majority of my coaching clients complain of having too little time, leaving them feeling depleted, stressed, frustrated, and pulled in every direction. Often, the first thing we work on together is creating something called margin.

What is margin? It's the "white space" in your appointment book.

Dr. Richard Swenson, author of *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*, defines margin as "the space that exists between ourselves and our limits. It is the amount allowed beyond that which is needed. It is something held in reserve for contingencies or unanticipated situations. Margin is the gap between rest and exhaustion, the space between breathing freely and suffocating."

So, how do you create margin? Swenson tells us that we create margin by building these four things into our lives:

- Simplicity
- Contentment
- Balance
- Rest

### Seek Simplicity

"It is my observation that too many of us are spending money we haven't earned to buy things we don't need to impress people we don't like."

--Ken Blanchard

Seeking simplicity requires that we reduce the clutter in our lives--including possessions, activities, and people. To simplify your life, become crystal clear about your goals, and then do the following:

- Identify what you are willing to take on in order to reach your goals.

- Identify what you are willing to let go of.

- Identify activities that are all-consuming but not necessarily important to you. This is a case of "less is more" -- doing less of what is not important enables you to do more of what matters most.

- Let go of relationships that do not enhance your life.

- That's right - people can be clutter, too!

- Let go of possessions that do not enhance your life on a regular basis - things that take up space, require maintenance, and make decision-making more complicated.

- Let go of important tasks that someone else can do - delegate!

- Let go of petty annoyances. Make a list of 10 things in your life that bother you. Then give yourself a month to fix it, clean it, toss it, etc... or let go of it!

- Let go of the past. Imagine where you want to be in the future and move toward it.

### Cultivate Contentment

"There are two ways to get enough. One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less."

--G.K. Chesterton

Contentment is something we learn. It is a relative state. Comparing is the enemy of contentment. "Having it all" may not be in your best interest! Consider these questions when making decisions about activities, purchases, or relationships:

Will this activity enhance my life?

Will this purchase add meaning and fulfillment to my life one month from now? How about one year from now? If I don't purchase this, will I regret it later? If I decide to purchase this later, will it still be available?

Will this relationship move me toward or away from what I want to be and do in my life?

### Bring Balance

"Much of our pain in life comes from the sense that we're succeeding in one role at the expense of other, possibly even more important, roles. Success in one role can't justify failure in another. Business success can't justify failure in a marriage; success in the community can't justify failure as a parent. Success or failure in any role contributes to the quality of every other role and life as a whole."

--Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

Your calendar reflects your values. The way you use your time reflects the way you live your life. Life is like a buffet line -- our plates fill up sooner than we realize. We need to say NO. NO is a complete sentence.

Finding balance is not a state we can get to or arrive at because it is always in motion. Balance is dynamic. It only exists in the midst of action. We are moving toward balance or away from it. Balance requires consistent, conscious, and controlled motion. Try balancing on one foot. Notice the fine adjustments you need to make in the foot and body in order to maintain equilibrium.

Being out of balance is the condition of being driven by circumstances without a sense of any choice. Language often spoken in these situations include I can't..., I have to..., or I gotta... When choice is gone, balance is gone-and with it goes the possibility of personal fulfillment.

To create balance in your life, consider the following:

Do you feel at choice in your life, or do you choose to live by I can't..., I gotta..., I have to..., and I should...?

Schedule a weekly time by yourself to plan the coming week based on what you choose.

Identify the key relationships (roles) in your life. What activities do you choose for the coming week to nurture each of these relationships?

Begin your weekly planning by considering the activities you choose to care for your physical, spiritual, mental, and social well-being. Caring first for yourself helps you to be more available to serve in each of your chosen roles without anger and resentment.

Remember that every time you say "yes" to someone or something, you are saying "no" to someone or something else.

## Restore Rest

"If you're burning the candle at both ends, you're not as bright as you think you are."

--Anonymous

Can you imagine what music would be like with no rests? Try humming a familiar tune without honoring the rests, and you'll soon recognize their value.

Wayne Muller, author of *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*, has the following to say about rest: "In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between action and rest. The busier we are, the more important we seem to ourselves and, we imagine, to others. To be unavailable to our friends and family, to be unable to find time for the sunset (or even to know the sun has set), to whiz through our obligations without time for a single mindful breath--this has become the model of a successful life. Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss the compass points that show us where to go, the nourishment that gives us succor, the quiet that gives us wisdom."

Cheryl Richardson, author of *Take Time for Your Life*, has identified the enemy of rest--adrenaline: "The increased speed by which we live has contributed to a society suffering from adrenaline overload more than information overload. When we use adrenaline as our main source of fuel, our body's adrenal system--the fight or flight response that is supposed to alert us to and prepare us for danger--never has a chance to rest. This hyper-vigilant state of fight or flight eventually makes it physiologically difficult to slow down."

If you are one who has difficulty relaxing when you have free time, your body is probably so accustomed to running on adrenaline that it does not know how to derive its fuel from healthier sources. It's time to start practicing new behaviors that reduce your reliance on adrenaline.

Restore rest in your life by trying some of these ideas:

Identify one day a week on which you choose not to conduct any business - no professional meetings or calls, correspondence, checking for messages or e-mail, etc. Many people choose Sunday for their "day of rest."

Plan something to rejuvenate yourself - perhaps a massage, bubble bath, listening to relaxing music, or losing yourself in a good book.

Determine the number of hours of sleep you need for optimal functioning. Create a plan to help you get the rest you need.

Breathe deeply. When running on adrenaline, we have a tendency towards shallow breathing. When we deprive our bodies of oxygen, we experience such things as cold hands, high blood pressure, and feeling anxious.

A brisk walk is one of the best things you can do to reduce stress and restore health to your adrenal system.

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