

3 Steps to Overcome the Overwhelm

By Krishen Kota

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When I started having dreams at night about how overwhelmed I felt regarding all the tasks I needed to get done at work, I knew I had to make some changes. I had reached a point where there was no light at the end of the tunnel. There was too much to do and too little time to get it done. It was at that point I started my journey to overcome the overwhelm. It was an interesting journey, as I will soon explain. But, before I get into the details, here are the basic steps I found to finally overcome the overwhelm:

- 1 Find out where you are spending your time.
- 2 Focus on priorities.
- 3 Implement a system that keeps you out of overwhelm.

Step 1

Find Out Where You Are Spending Your Time

Having dreams at night about the things I had to do at work the next day, was my signal that my approach to success had to change. I had tried many techniques for managing my life, read numerous books on subjects like time management and goal setting, but I could never seem to get rid of that feeling of overwhelm. I had exhausted all my options and knew I couldn't figure it out on my own, so I hired a professional coach.

My new coach helped me take the first step on my journey out of overwhelm. Step 1 was to get a clear picture of where I was spending my time. Of course I thought I already knew where I was spending my time, but I was somewhat surprised when I saw the results.

For a period of two weeks I carried around a small notebook and wrote down everything I did that took over five minutes. After two weeks of recording my daily activities, I added up the results. I took out a piece of paper and created a column for each category of activity. I categorized activities, such as commute time to work, time spent on lunch, time spent with my wife, and the like. Two things became very apparent. I was focused on too many priorities and I was spending too much time in traffic, an unbelievable nine hours per week. These discoveries led me to make some interesting decisions, which are outlined in Step 2 below.

Step 2

Focus On Priorities

Step 2 in my journey was to start focusing on my top priority goals. But before I could, I had to clear space in my schedule so that I would have enough time to focus on my top priority goals.

To free up time in my schedule, I had to get realistic on the number of priorities I could focus on at one time. Most of the activities I was involved in were things I wanted to do. The problem was there were many more things I wanted to do, than I had time to do.

I was able to create some space on my schedule by telling myself that I was just putting some activities on hold for now. I was not giving them up forever, but I was giving myself permission to put some activities on hold, to allow myself to focus on my most important priorities. I had to make some tough choices in order to create some space. For me, this was the key factor in overcoming my overwhelm.

I encourage you to start focusing on your priorities. Start by reviewing the list of activities that you identified in Step 1 above. Hi-light the activities that you could put on hold if you had to. How much time could you free up if you put some of those activities on hold? Write down how many hours per week you could make available.

After you have created space on your schedule, take time to create specific top priority goals for yourself. Take out a sheet of paper and make a list of everything you would like to create in your life. Make sure everything on the list represent things you really want and not things that you think others would approve. Take your wish list and select 10 items on your list that you feel are the most important to you. Ask yourself, what can you accomplish in the next 12 months? Take those top 10 items you identified and make them into specific, quantifiable goals. It is important to make sure each one is measurable. For instance, one thing on my list was to create a better relationship with my wife. To make that a quantifiable goal, I rewrote it as "bring my wife flowers once a week for the next 12 months". And in case you were wondering, she loved it!

To assist you with Step 2, I would highly recommend "Your Best Year Yet", by Jinny S.Ditzler. This book is a great resource to help you create your top 10 priority goals. It walks you through a step-by-step process of defining 10 compelling goals that you want to fulfill in the next 12 months.

I attended a seminar based on the book above. When the person leading the seminar suggested that we were going to define 10 goals for ourselves, I thought "wow, that's a lot of goals". But about half way through the seminar I realized that I was already focusing on about 30 different loosely defined goals. Since that seminar I have been focusing on a mere 10 goals, and it has definitely made a positive impact on overcoming my overwhelm.

Step 3

Set Up a Support System to Keep You Out of Overwhelm

The third and final step is to set up a support system to keep you out of overwhelm. My system involves several key elements. My 12-month top 10 priority goals, which I break down into monthly and weekly goals, give me something on which to focus.

Beyond the written goals, the most important elements of my system for staying out of overwhelm include my wife and my coach. They help me see things I can't see. For example, when I started getting a little overwhelmed about what to write for this article, my wife pointed out that my overwhelm about this article was a great example to write about. My coach gave me the simple advice of breaking down the article into sections and to just work on one section at a time.

It is critical for you to have other people involved in your system to provide you with support, and to help identify your blind spots. Without other people, you don't really have a system; you just have a theoretical approach to a real world problem.

If you find yourself overwhelmed, take the time to implement the following steps and see how they work for you:

- 1 Get a clear picture of where you are spending your time
 - Record all of your activities over the next two weeks
- 2 Focus on priorities
 - Put non-priorities on hold
 - Create your top-10 priority goals
- 3 Set up a system to keep you out of overwhelm
 - Keep focusing on your goals
 - Get other people involved to help keep you out of overwhelm

Also, here is a list of additional resources I have found to be extremely valuable in my own work and life to help overcome the overwhelm:

- Your Best Year Yet: Ten Questions for Making the Next Twelve Months Your Most Successful Ever, by Jinny S. Ditzler, New York: Warner Books, 2000
(Available at major bookstores and at www.amazon.com)
- "Success...From the Inside Out!" by Jeanne Sharbuno, Free Monthly E-Mail Newsletter – to subscribe, send email to: success_insideout-subscribe@topica.com
- Work Less, Make More: Stop working so hard and create the life you really want!, by Jennifer White, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998, 1999
(Available at major bookstores and at www.amazon.com)

If you have gotten to a point in your life where you know it's time to make a change and get out of overwhelm, then let this information act as your roadmap. I think the world would be a much better place if everyone had less stress in his or her life. Start your journey to overcome the overwhelm today. A low stress life is waiting for you on the other side!

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