

The Balanced Lawyer

Jeff Davidson

How To Stay On Target

In this day and age of so much competition for your attention, a surprisingly simple way to stay on target, all day long, is to pose a few critical questions to yourself.

First up is one of my favorites, employed by some of the top time management gurus in the field:

What Is The Most Effective Use Of My Time?

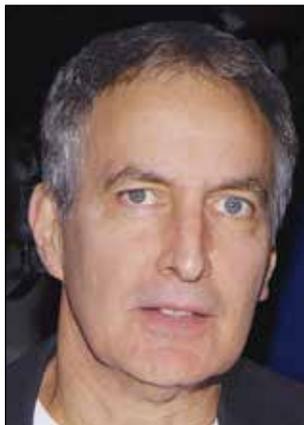
This insightful question helps you to automatically re-direct yourself when you feel as if you're not as productive as you could be, or somehow have strayed from the path that you originally intended to follow. The question, "What is the most effective use of my time?" is something you want to ask yourself anytime you feel the need. Multiple times per day is not too much!

When the question, "What is the most effective use of my time?" surfaces at all, it's usually a good

indication that you're facing some sort of quandary, and hence probably need to re-direct your efforts.

Suppose you face a variety of unrelated tasks — and when does that *not* happen? Or, you face a variety of related tasks on the same project. Asking yourself what is the most effective use of your time invariably helps direct you to that task, which at present, merits your attention.

At any given moment you have the opportunity to make a choice, even if a task or project has been going particularly well, you get to make the choice as to how to use your time starting at that moment.



Am I Imprisoned By The Past?

In a study published in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, researchers Rachel Karniol, Ph.D. at Tel Aviv University in Israel, and Michael Ross, Ph.D. at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, found that "People less able to relate the person of the

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past to the person they are now may be at greater psychological risk because they are thinking only in the present and their view of the future may not be developed.” If you’re unable to recognize how you’ve changed, you’re likely to allow your past to over-influence your decisions.

“Individuals often react to the present as if they were living in the past,” say the researchers. To make free and clear choices about what we want in the future, it behooves each of us to draw accurately upon our pasts but also note what’s different about today. This means that you do not have to proceed as an extension of what came before. The choice you make in the here and now can represent a complete break from how you would have proceeded in the past: said another way, you can be free at last!

Rather than living life by looking through a rear view mirror, boldly go where you’ve never gone before, and you’ll accomplish achievements that may have seemed beyond your grasp. You can proceed in a totally new direction if that is what makes sense at this moment. You can make a slight twist or turn. Or, you can continue as you have been doing.

Will It Be Any Easier Later?

When faced with a situation I would prefer to put off, I ask myself, “Will it be any easier later?” If the task will be easier later, then I have rational justification for not proceeding on that particular task. For example, if I have to organize all the receipts related to a certain project that will be in progress for another week, I can readily put off this task for another week. Then, with all the receipts collected, I can organize them accordingly, knowing I can do the job until its ultimate completion.

If the task won’t be any easier later, then it largely makes sense to proceed now, particularly if it may be more difficult later. Preparing for a speech, an interview, or an exam several days beforehand is a wiser approach to studying rather than cramming the night before.

If you have the option of taking work home with you, will you still be as equal to the task at home in a different, potentially more distracting environment, as you would be in the work-related atmosphere of your office? If you will be as capable, okay, judiciously take the work home. More often, the task will not be easier later, so look for ways to handle them right where you are.

Who Created That?

Years ago, I took a course based on the work of Robert Fritz, a musician and film maker turned accomplishment guru. In his book, *The Path Of Least Resistance*, he discusses how to employ self-imposed questions to move from where you are to where you want to be. One of the questions that he advises people to ask of themselves is, “Who created that?”

Any time of day, for any situation you face, if you ask yourself, “Who created that?” invariably the answer comes back that you did. How so? You are experiencing a stringent deadline and are working diligently, but feel intense pressure. Who created that situation? You did, for many reasons. You chose to study law. You applied for a position with your present employer or launched your own practice. You assumed the post, took on the assignment, allocated available resources in some manner, and now find yourself at, say, 10 a.m. with five hours to go before a vital deadline looms.

Sure, you can blame your parents for not passing on the proper genes to you. You can blame your previous employer for having a less-than-palatable work environment, prompting you to seek your present position with a new employer. You could blame your boss for not introducing the assignment hours or days earlier, and you could come up with at least a dozen other factors as to why you are a victim as opposed to a perpetrator.

When you clear away the rubble, get brutally honest with yourself, and face the music, most of the situations you face are, a majority of the time,

your own doing. This is true for nearly everyone. We play in the sandbox and claim we didn't step into it, didn't pick up the shovel, and didn't cause that speck of sand to fly into our eye. If you milk it for all its worth, you can labor under this delusion all your life.

Over the course of your 20,000 to 28,000 days, most of what transpires in your life is the result of choices you make. Yes, in the field of law stuff hap-

pens from out of left field. Mostly, you make the choices that impact your life.

When you accept responsibility for the situation, you put the locus of control back where it belongs, in your own head. From there, miraculous things can happen. You created the situation, and sure as heck you're going to resolve it. No more second guessing, no more recriminations, no more lost time on the path. Take responsibility, take charge, and get it done.

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