

Tools of The Trade

Effective Systems

What works and what doesn't

1. What systems do I use to manage my time?
2. Are they working?
3. What are systems that would work if you used them?
4. Do I already know what works and what I need to do to manage my time?
5. Is there one thing I could do that I know would make the difference in managing my time?

The Tools

1. Choose **ONE** main CALENDAR or PLANNER for the family. More than one can mean overlapping and missed events. (Now it is okay to have a back up. My planner is the main one and absolutely everything goes into it but I also have a wall calendar in the bathroom that I put things on for easy viewing and reminders). With older children, each family member will need their own system and calendar, but in order for you, as Mom, to stay sane, there needs to be one main system and that needs to be yours.
2. CHOOSE a system that appeals to you and your preferences. The two main types are paper and electronic/computer.

Paper – the possibilities are endless. Spend some time finding one that really appeals to YOU. Questions to help you decide:

Do I like to add/remove items? (Go with a binder style)

Do I want it to be portable?

Do I like to have themes, styles, inspirational notes or would I prefer to keep it plain?

Will I use all the components of it? If not, can I remove them?

Will it fit in my purse/diaper bag/brief case?

What have I used before?

What did I like/dislike about it?

Electronic:

Do I need something that I can carry with me?

Is it compatible with my current system?

Do I have the option to use or remove different features?

Do I want it to be compatible with my phone?

Do I like how it operates?

3. Use this main planner FOR *EVERYTHING* – including your work, appointments, family’s activities, exercise, and most importantly, your ***Me Time***.
4. MATCH the size to your lifestyle. My retired mother-in-law uses a small calendar with an entire month on each page. I need at least one full page per day. If you are on the go, make sure it is portable. A big wall calendar doesn’t help when you are at hockey practice or in the office.
5. The COMPONENTS of your system will vary by preference but there are a few necessary components:
 - Yearly calendar
 - Monthly calendar
 - A page for each day (or a lot of writing room)
 - Room for notes/lists
 - Your ***To Do*** list – which deserves its own section below.
 - Your goals and dreams. List your priorities in your planner. At the beginning of each day review your goals and make sure that you are doing something to work toward them. Each month review your long-term goals, alter your short-term goals, or add new goals.
6. PERSONALIZE Your System. Now depending on your lifestyle there are lots of different components/options that you may want to include in your system.
 - Phone List/Phone log
 - Family Budget
 - Expense Reports
 - Travel/car logs
 - Emergency Contacts
 - Medical Information
 - Grocery Lists –a standard one that you always use
 - Assignment lists
 - Fitness Journal

To Do Lists

1. Grab a piece of paper and quickly write out your current To Do list.

Review your To Do list

Grab the list you wrote up earlier in the chapter or go get today's list and do these steps to see how they work.

1. **REVIEW** your list and see what you can **DELEGATE**.

Can you write someone's name next to something on your list? Can your partner or children do a task? Can your assistant at work do it? Can you hire someone to do it? It is amazing the number of services that are available. Visit www.iceaweb.org for a listing of personal assistants that can do almost anything you need and usually for a very reasonable fee. For more information on delegating, refer back to chapter five.

2. **REMOVE ITEMS** from your list.

Do you really need to do all the things on your list? Will life continue on without doing a few of the items? Can you get by on the groceries in the house or put off vacuuming for a few days? Do you really need to go somewhere or can you make a phone call? Are you over-committed? Is it time to say no? Do the items on your list lead you in the direction you want to go?

3. **PRIORITIZE YOUR LIST**. This step is what makes To Do lists work.

We do not just randomly put things on our To Do lists. We put things there that we feel need to be done, but as we all know, we rarely get our lists accomplished. We need to alter how we look at our lists - it is not supposed to be a competition in which the person who does the most wins. If we are thinking this way, then we will consciously only put the things we know we can do on our lists. As I have stated above, we need to shift our perspective and we need to do what is truly important to us.