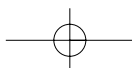
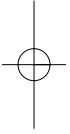


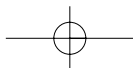
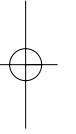
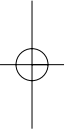
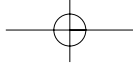
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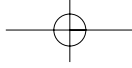
Prescription for change

Change your thoughts and you change your world.

Norman Vincent Peale







7 What would you do if you had the time?

Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.

Carl Sandburg

You know that time is finite and you cannot have any more than 24 hours each day. Each week there are 168 hours for you. If you deduct 10 hours each day for sleeping and eating there are still 98 hours left! You *can* make a difference in your life; changes *will* happen if you are willing to consider ways to do things differently and are prepared to take some action and shift some energy!

Dr A leaves his busy surgery and wonders where another day has gone. When he arrived the appointment list was already full and so was the waiting room. Before half an hour had passed, the receptionist brought in more sets of notes, and he felt a tension headache develop, which lasted until every patient had left. The list of visits had grown by then. The woman who lives over the road won't have anything much wrong with her except a hangover. Meanwhile his own children are asleep in bed, and his wife is furious with him for being late again. He would dearly love to have more time for his family and for himself too. He would like to play squash again, but each day is the same. Whatever plans he makes have to be abandoned because he is so exhausted by the time he eventually gets home.

If you are frustrated about not getting things done and find that weeks go by when you never manage to find extra time for the things you used to love to do before you got on the unending treadmill of overwork, then you need to manage your time differently.

You may not recall when you last said, 'That was a fantastic day', and realise there has been something lacking in your life over the last few years.

It's important to be clear about what you would do if you had extra time.

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Knowing this gives you an added incentive to free up time. By planning to do something very specific you will have a measure of whether or not you've been successful. What would you like to do again without feeling the pressure? Would you like to spend more hours with your partner, family and friends? Are you keen to be more involved in your community?

Make a list of all the things you want to do

Write a date next to each item by when you want to have done it. Month by month write what you need to do in order to reach your goal for the end of the year. For example, you've decided that you want to complete a certain project. That's fine. It's a good idea which is specific, measurable, achievable and realistic. But it's no good saying to yourself 'Well that's OK then, I don't need to worry about doing that until November'. No, that's no good at all. What you have to do now is to divide the big project into 12 tasks which you can set yourself to complete by the end of each month. You could then divide each of these into four weekly tasks. By doing that you will ensure that the whole project is completed by the end of the year.

Stop wasting time

People find life entirely too time-consuming.

Stanislaw J Lec

How do you spend your day? Do you know specifically? How long do you speak on the telephone, answer emails, drink coffee, talk to colleagues, watch television, and eat?

Become more time aware

Keep a log of everything you do over 24 hours. Jot down what you are doing every quarter of an hour and make a note every time you change activity.

Notice how long you take for:

- each phone call
- a cup of coffee
- chatting to a colleague about nothing in particular
- your lunch
- sitting and staring into space
- commuting
- exercising.

What would you do if you had the time? 45

Keep a note of all your activities for a day or two. What do you notice? When you discover some of the time wasters, decide what you can do differently to free up some time.

Dr B realises that he has long telephone conversations during the day. He decides to preface any future calls with 'I have five minutes available'. He keeps an eye on the clock and then at the end of that time concludes with 'Sorry, but I have to go now'.

Dr C takes much longer than the other doctors to see his patients. He lets them 'ramble on' and as he sorts out one thing for them they get into the 'while I'm here doctor...' scenario. He comes to terms with the 10 minutes he has allotted for each person and has a large clock on his desk so he can keep an eye on it. As the patient starts to talk about other things he learns techniques for getting them back on track. 'OK then, so is the bottom line that you have a new pain in your shoulder you are worried about ... let's arrange to have it X-rayed and in the meantime take these tablets and see if they help.' He hands over the form and the prescription while standing up and going to the door.

Delegate

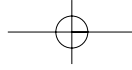
You have identified time wasters and are beginning to eliminate these. Now, look again at how you spend your day, notice what you are doing and if it is actually your job? Are you spending time doing tasks which someone else could or should be doing?

If you are a doctor and spend time filing patient notes, ask yourself if this is your job. Even if there is a staff shortage, it is still not your job. You may believe you are helping a colleague but in fact you are masking a problem. If you were too busy, would the clerical staff do your clinic or surgery for you? Why not? *Because it's not their job.* You have very specialised skills and experience. Using them is what you are paid to do.

So, make a list of tasks you actually do, and note who *should* or *could* be doing them, instead. Tell your colleagues that you will no longer be doing those things. Scary? Yes of course it is.

It's time to change

Perhaps you offered to help out one day when things were busy and what started as a gesture of kindness has become an expectation and even an obligation.



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It's difficult to say 'no'

Saying 'no' more often, will have a huge impact on the time you have available to do what *you* want.

- What is the worst thing which could happen if you say 'no'?
- What is the best thing that can happen if you say 'no'?
- When you say 'no' what are you saying 'yes' to?

How come you do someone else's work? Did you say yes for the sake of a quiet life? A quiet life for whom? A quiet external life maybe, but what about the turmoil and frustration you feel inside? Are you someone who agrees to do whatever you are asked? Do people say 'Oh she'll do it' or 'He'll do it'?

Challenge your beliefs

Consider what is it about saying no you find difficult. It may be you feel guilty about something when you say no, and come up with a lot of 'shoulds' to justify what you do.

Complete the phrase: 'I should...'. These will be some of your internal rules of life (your beliefs). How many 'shoulds' are on your list? Ask yourself after each statement 'Why?' until you can't answer it any more.

Where do those beliefs come from? If they came from your parents, think about their situation, their childhood and how different it was from yours. Most parents do the best they can for their children. But they are influenced by what they learned from *their* parents and so on, *ad infinitum*. Their rules do not need to be your rules today. You are an adult and can change the way you do things.

See what happens when you adapt your list of 'I should' statements to a list of your 'I choose (if I want)' statements. How does reading from the 'I choose' compared with the 'I should' seem? It's about choice. You do have a choice (you really do). You can choose the way you do this or do that, with a smile or with a frown. For example, 'I should invite so and so over to dinner next week', becomes 'I choose (if I want) to invite so and so for dinner next week'.

What can you delegate to someone else?

- Tasks that you don't enjoy.
- Things that it is not your job to do.
- Routine tasks that you can train someone else to do.

What would you do if you had the time? 47

A few suggestions for you follow. You can add lots more.

Dr C is increasingly frustrated by sorting through thick files whilst listening to her patients. She persuades her partners that the practice would benefit by employing a filing clerk who systematically tidies up the files.

In an effort to delegate tasks, Dr D does all the smears for the practice while Dr E sees all the patients with diabetes.

What can you delegate to someone else?

Stop completely

What could you avoid or stop doing altogether? They may be things which do not need to be delegated because they don't need to be done at all.

When you've been through the 'why' questioning suggested, you may have identified some tasks which you realise are on your 'to do' list because they are things which 'have always been done', rather than things which need to be done today in today's circumstances. Take them off your list and reduce your stress.

The GP who retired used to see pharmaceutical representatives whenever they chose to come into the surgery. Even though they had to wait until he had seen some patients, he always spent time with them. This irritated the new partner Dr F, who didn't like the interruption. He decided to only see the reps between 9 and 10 am on Wednesdays. Once they knew the changed routine the reps cooperated and Dr F managed to leave the surgery on time regularly.

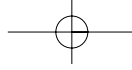
Stop procrastinating

Procrastination is the thief of time.

Edward Young

Just get on and do the things you absolutely have to do. Why don't you? If you don't have the skills you need for the task, then acquire them. Find someone to help.

Dr G isn't very good with computers, so he asks his teenage son to help him.



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Sometimes a task seems so big its very size is off-putting. Break the task into bite-sized chunks so that you make a start, however small. For example, you need to clear the clutter of a lifetime and you realise this may take several weeks or more to complete. As you haven't got this time to spare you end up not even starting because of time limitations. However, if you recognise that even though you don't have some weeks or even a whole day to spend on the project, you do have an hour tomorrow morning. If you decide to look, you can find the odd five minutes during the day when you could sort through a file or two.

Thinking of the big project, what could you complete in an hour? Perhaps you could clear one quarter of your desk. So do it. And another quarter the next day and so on. You are getting it done. Chunk by chunk, some progress is being made!

Say 'no' more often

Have you been asked to do something you don't really want to do? Sometimes it's difficult to say 'no'. You may feel guilty, especially if someone is asking you for help. Saying 'no' is a vital skill to develop if you want more time. Just say it, and try not to get into a discussion about why. This is about you recognising your own needs and keeping within your personal boundaries. When you look at how you spend your day, if you find that a considerable amount of work is unplanned, and consists of doing extras for others, then saying 'no' is an important skill to acquire urgently.

When asked if he could 'just fill in this market research form', Dr I replies he doesn't want to do that.

Asked if she would mind 'reading through this report and telling me what you think of it', Dr J says she will do it later.

Streamline your tasks

So you've freed up time, delegated some things, got rid of others, decided not to procrastinate any more and learned how to say 'no'. However, there are still some tasks that have to be done by you. What else can you do?

Have you reached your 'enough is enough' time?

Has your partner or spouse told you things will have to change otherwise you can't stay together? Do you fear the break up of your partnership, your

What would you do if you had the time? 49

life, your world? Do you try to please all of the people all of the time and now realise you are desperately unhappy and near to breaking point?

Go back through the suggestions in this chapter and decide on one thing you can change this week.

Devise systems for doing regular tasks

You can decide what to delegate and what to dump, but you might not be as efficient as you could be for the tasks you have to do. Have you ever watched yourself and notice how streamlined you are in the way you do your tasks? You need to improve and streamline your systems.

Dr K realises that every time he wants to look up something in the *British National Formulary* he has to get out of his chair to reach it. He puts some bookends on his desk and keeps it within easy reach.

Dr L designates half an hour (timed) at the start and end of each day to read and answer emails.

Dr M decides the amount of time each day that she will use to sign prescriptions, the day of the month that she will check her credit card receipts, and the day and time each week when she will go to the gym.

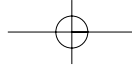
What steps can you take this week to free up some time? Be specific about what you will do. Ask or tell the appropriate people about the changes you decide to make.

Who can support you?

Drs N, O and P decide to support each other to make life better for them all. There is some resistance at first, but eventually their colleagues find the new way of running the practice works well and has the bonus of a much happier atmosphere between them.

Stephen Covey suggests drawing a grid labelled as follows.¹

- 1 *Urgent and important* e.g. medical crises, pressing problems, deadline-driven projects, meetings, preparations.
- 2 *Not urgent and important* e.g. preparation, prevention, values



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clarification, planning, relationship building, empowerment, true recreation.

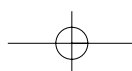
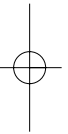
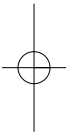
- 3 *Urgent and not important* e.g. interruptions, some phone calls, some mail, some reports, some meetings.
- 4 *Not urgent and not important* e.g. trivia, busy work, junk mail, some phone calls, time wasters, 'escape' activities.

Many doctors spend their time doing things which are both 'urgent and important'. However, if you plan more carefully, it's possible to do more in the 'important but not urgent' segment; eliminate, by delegating, most of the 'urgent and not important' tasks; and eliminate completely most of the 'non-urgent/non-important' things (the time wasters).

So ... what will you do now? Remember, nothing changes until you take some action.

Reference

- 1 Covey S (1994) *First Things First*. Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, London.



8 No more procrastination

Procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday.

Don Marquis

Excuses

You decide to change yet nothing happens because you don't actually put your ideas into practice. How come you are so good at delaying? What is it about you or your personality that means, in spite of all your good intentions, your ideas stay on the back burner? They simmer away, draining your energy and yet are never cooked enough to make a difference.

Is it because you are so busy each day that some things never get done, even when they reach the top of your 'to do' list? If so, perhaps you need to look at your time management skills. Do you regularly find a reason not to do what you promise? Are you angry when someone asks, 'Haven't you done that yet?', because they don't understand how difficult life is for you? Some make excuses such as the following.

- There's no point in starting to clear the cupboard in my surgery desk as I haven't the time to finish it this afternoon.
- I can't use the new software as I'm not sure how to apply it to my practice.
- I don't have time to finish dictating letters because the patients talked too much.

Do you start each day putting aside tasks which have been in your head for days, weeks or months, because something more urgent has come to the top of your list? When will you actually do what you plan? The things which don't get done stay waiting, the thought of them lurking in the back of your mind, draining your energy.

What can you do?

You will have the jobs you've been putting off for ages done in record time.

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Sometimes, when you are stuck in one task, everything else is forgotten. Unfortunately there are always the urgent and important tasks which have to be dealt with under pressure. However, if you've made an effort to put a routine in place for daily tasks which help you cope with it all, then you will be able to get back on track again quickly.

- Stop wasting time on non-urgent and non-important tasks.
- Plan your day more effectively.
- Write down what you want to do each day.
- Break the tasks into much smaller chunks.
- Get the file out.
- Develop efficient systems to be more efficient.

Decide on a set of daily tasks and set yourself a time for each. Then move on to the next task even if you haven't finished the first one.¹

Change your routine

A very important part of time management is to stop doing the things which you don't need to be doing. When thinking about getting things done consider whether what you are attempting to do is really on your own agenda or if it's because you are under pressure from someone else.

You may be doing things for no other reason except that 'it's the way it's always been done in this department'. Is there another way to do it more efficiently or could some of the things be dropped as not being relevant any more?

Dr P knows he spends too much time on the internet or answering emails instead of getting more important tasks done. He sets a limit for emails and internet surfing to half an hour morning and evening.

What do you have to learn?

Do you need to acquire new skills to be more efficient? If you are finding it difficult to keep up with information and ways of doing things, then admit this to yourself and tell your colleagues that you would like some assistance or support for some specific training, instead of struggling to do it all.

Ways to learn

There are many different ways you might do this:

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- read journals and textbooks
- go on a course
- find support from others
- learn from the internet
- view an educational video or television programme
- discussion with colleagues
- the 'hands on' approach of someone talking you through a procedure.

Dr C, whose keyboard skills are not very good, feels frustrated until he signs on for a course to learn to touch type and subsequently becomes less stressed.

Who can you ask?

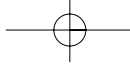
It's OK to ask for assistance. You believe that you have to do it all and would appear incompetent if you ask for help. Talk about what you find stressful or difficult. Let go of your fear that others will see you as lacking ability if you admit that something is challenging. Ask yourself, 'What is the worst thing that could happen to me if I called for some support?'. You may be surprised at how ready people are to lend a hand when you ask and find they understand your difficulty. If they are not able or willing to assist you themselves they may suggest someone else who can. Wouldn't you do the same for them if they were struggling with something that was easy for you?

Just do it

You've delegated everything you can, you've surprised yourself and said 'no' more times than you thought possible without the world falling apart as a result, you've set up efficient systems and acquired all the skills you need to do the tasks without feeling incompetent. You've eliminated as much as possible after asking the question, 'Does this actually need to be done by me or indeed by anyone, or has it become a routine with no rationale?'.
So there's no basis to procrastinate any longer. When will you take action? Make up your mind about what you are going to get done this week and 'just do it'.

No more excuses

If you are extremely clear about what you want to achieve then it is more



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likely you will succeed. Break huge tasks into 'bite-sized pieces' and make a start. Don't wait any longer.

Dr R wanted to get up to date with reading through the pile of medical journals but never got around to it. He decided to look through this week's *BMJ* for an hour on Friday afternoon, and takes those older than one month, read or unread, for recycling.

What happens next?

You will get on with your life and do whatever you really want to do.

'Off days' are a part of life, I guess, whether you're a cartoonist, a neurosurgeon, or an air-traffic controller.

Gary Larson

Know the true value of time; snatch, seize, and enjoy every moment of it. No idleness; no laziness; no procrastination; never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.

Lord Chesterfield

Reference

- 1 Forster M (2000) *Get Everything Done*. Hodder and Stoughton, London.

9 Looking after number one

Equipped for life

Your life in and out of medicine is full of gadgets and equipment all of which need regular servicing, maintenance and care. You may have been persuaded to take out a contract to cover every possibility. You are clear that disaster would strike if such and such didn't function the way it should, so you sign on the dotted line. You have covered yourself for all eventualities. This gives you some sort of satisfaction, since you know what you would miss most if it broke down and could no longer be mended.

What is the most vital piece of equipment for your medical practice? Is it your computer, your car or your mobile phone? How would you manage without one of them? Maybe you have some spares, or an older model kept in a cupboard, although it may need repairing, ready for any possibility. Perhaps colleagues would be willing to lend you theirs (for a while at least).

You live in a world dependent on technology working well and being available.

Dr A has his computer operating system upgraded to the latest version. The newest practice management software is installed. Anti-virus software scans regularly. Everything should be working well but it isn't. One day he has to delay starting the surgery because the computer has crashed so he has no access to patient records or prescriptions.

Dr B is annoyed when the local garage tells him it will take three days to repair his car. He has to employ a driver at great expense to take him on his visits (even more frustrating because most of them could have come to the surgery).

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When Dr C arrives at her outpatient clinic on the other side of the city she finds it has been cancelled because of a shortage of nursing staff. No one has been able to contact her as her mobile phone was switched off.

These examples remind you how much modern medical practice depends on equipment working well. If you keep up to date and all your equipment is serviced and upgraded regularly, then your life may run pretty smoothly. Or are there several outstanding jobs that you have in this area of your life?

What do you need to look after above all else?¹

However careful you are, you may be neglecting the most important piece of technology in your life. Yourself. Do you fully take care of your most essential tool? Do you do the things that you know are good for your health and wellbeing? Do you service yourself regularly and check that you work properly? Is your energy generated from the best source? Do you provide yourself with the most efficient fuel or do you poison yourself with alcohol, drugs, unhealthy food or nicotine?

Take a moment to think about yourself – your body, mind and spirit. Consider these as your own, your very own ‘personal operating system’, which needs as much or even more care and attention as all your other equipment put together. This is the most important machine you have and you know, better than most, that it cannot be replaced if and when it fails.

Does your system need optimising?

Are you functioning as well as you can? You may believe you are fighting fit and can do as much as you always could, yet somehow you don’t feel the same as you did years ago and the sparkle isn’t there as often. You want to get it back again but feel you have lost your enthusiasm for life. When your *BMJ* arrives do you go to the Obituaries first? Does that make you aware of your own mortality?

You don’t want your colleagues to see you as weak and unable to cope, of course you don’t. The culture still persists among the medical profession that doctors don’t get ill and can cope with everything. Perhaps this is the reason you carry on bravely and tell people everything is fine, even though you know it isn’t. You may be tempted to self-medicate or talk to a colleague about your ‘friend’ who has certain symptoms, instead of arranging a professional consultation. Your colleagues probably know that you are not managing. They may talk about you behind your back and yet not give you the support you would like.

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Pause for a moment. Take a look in the mirror. What do you see? Does your face show the strain of the last few years?

Glance around at your colleagues. Are they happy at the thought of another day in the outpatient clinic, or are they fed up too? Are their faces tense and do they look tired? Of course it isn't right to make instant judgements about someone's appearance; however, looking at yourself and the way you've changed over the years may be helpful.

During your working week you advise many of your patients about ways to look after themselves better. You may tell them to give up smoking, to take more exercise and to eat a more healthy diet. Do you walk your talk? Do you follow the guidelines yourself or is it a case of 'Do as I say not as I do'?

Think about yourself

How can you make positive improvements in your life? Start with your diet. What can you do to improve this? How do you boost your energy when you are exhausted?

Are you poisoning yourself with excessive sugar, too much food, caffeine, junk food, tobacco, alcohol or drugs, prescribed or otherwise? Can you think of other ways to feel more energetic, for example, taking a walk at lunch time, eating more fruit or vegetables? Is your diet as nutritious and healthy as it could be?

When you look after yourself everything else works well and life becomes easier. The clinics may still have too many attending, but you won't feel quite so stressed. The patients may be as demanding and rude, but you will be able to cope much better.

Upgrade the way you look after yourself this week and notice how much better you feel.

Dr B is too busy to eat anything at lunchtime and keeps herself going with cups of black coffee. She is exhausted at the end of the day. She decides to bring a sandwich and go over to the park to eat it quietly away from the hospital.

Mr C arrives on the ward out of breath. His only exercise is from the car to the clinic, the clinic to the ward, the ward to the car. He is putting on weight and has no energy. He decides enough is enough and it's time to do something for himself. He realises that it is only five miles to the hospital. He buys himself a new bike and uses the cycle route to and from work each day. He's surprised how quickly he gets there after the first week which is a bit of a struggle. He gets used to the jokes from his colleagues and begins to feel more alert and energetic.

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Are you muttering 'Oh, I'll do something when I'm not so busy' under your breath as you read this? Are you thinking something along the lines of the following:

- It's no good expecting me to make big changes when things are completely overwhelming.
- Yes, I know what to do and I'll do it one of these days. Just stop putting pressure on me to do it right now.

That's not good enough. If you want to change, that is not a valid excuse. Do you really believe that you'll wake up one day and say 'I'm not busy today'. This is a delaying tactic. You can make a very small change today, if you decide to do so. Small changes grow into bigger changes. What very small change could you commit to making every day this week? If you really want things to improve you have to find the time you need. How much time does it take to choose a healthy dessert instead of a pudding, or have a piece of fruit instead of a bar of chocolate? Of course you can do it, even if you are busy. The only thing that stops you is your own mental attitude. Change from saying to yourself, 'I don't have time' to 'I have all the time I need to make a small change today'. Do it now before it's too late.

Now is the time to take stock, to change things, step by small step, even while you are busy. Suppose you realise you don't eat enough fruit each day. To eat five portions may seem impossible so how about starting with one piece? Instead of dismissing the big change as not possible, do a bite-sized version of it. Commit yourself to introducing your new habit, however small that may be, on a daily basis from today.

Imagine your working day as enjoyable, stress-free and with everything going smoothly, and at last you have the time to start looking after yourself more. What would you do? How could you improve yourself? Would you start with your mind, your body or your spirit? Just one new habit this week. Make the commitment. It's often motivating to have someone to be answerable to. Is there a friend or colleague who could encourage and inspire you to keep going for the first few days when it may seem an impossible prospect to change the routine of many years?

Drs X and Y who live near each other and not too far from the surgery decide to meet at the end of the road and walk together to and from work.

Drs P and Q realise how unhealthy their diet is and so they decide to take it in turns to bring a healthy packed lunch.

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It's time to listen to yourself and take the advice you already know and regularly give to your patients. These headings serve as reminders.

For a healthy body

- Eat a balanced diet.
- Reduce the amount of caffeine, sugar and fat in your diet.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Don't smoke.
- Exercise regularly – walking is as good as anything.
- Stretch with yoga or pilates.
- Aerobic exercise – running, dancing, cycling.
- Drink alcohol in moderation only.
- Avoid unnecessary medication.
- Seek advice rather than self-prescribe.

For a healthy mind

- Be curious.
- Ask questions.
- Take chances.
- Recognise your needs and satisfy them.
- Don't expect your nearest and dearest to be all things to you.
- Learn new things.
- Be dedicated to lifelong learning (and not just medicine!).
- Be open to possibilities.
- Get out of your rut and follow wherever your spirit leads you.

For a healthy spirit²

- Take time for yourself: meditate or sit quietly away from others; spend time in nature; by water or whatever puts your inner self at peace for a few minutes each day.
- Spend time with your family. Maintain your priorities: if you have small children, they only take their first step once.
- Be involved in your community.
- Do what you are passionate about: a feeling of joy and wellbeing comes from doing something you really love to do.
- Be at peace: let go of anger, frustration and fear.

Whatever is happening is what is perfect for you at this time. Find the positive amongst the negative and relax. However much people irritate or anger you, be more accepting. Whatever will be is for the best. It's time to let go of your wish to be in control and trust that others will do whatever needs to be done.

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You can do it

Start, step by step. Introduce the changes you want to make one by one, week by week. Some people find it helps to make a list of 'daily habits'. These could start with one or two small things you could easily introduce into your routine. Week by week add another new habit. Do these regularly each week until after about a month they become automatic.

Go on, give yourself the greatest chance to live the best life you possibly can. Don't make any more excuses. Start today with one or two small changes. It won't take long for you to understand how much better your life can be.

Five ways to survive as a doctor³

- 1 Make sure you do things other than work.
- 2 Create your dream work schedule.
- 3 Learn to say 'no', without feeling guilty.
- 4 If you need help, ask for it.
- 5 Seek peer support.

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10 What's draining you?

Every time you don't follow your inner guidance, you feel a loss of energy, loss of power, a sense of spiritual deadness.

Shakti Gawain

Here you are

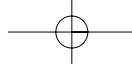
You wonder if anything can ever change. You resign yourself to feeling like you do, for the rest of your life, even though that makes you feel very unhappy. What else can you possibly do? You've done all the things the personal development books tell you to do. You've perfected your time management skills, looked after your mind, body and spirit until they are all shining beacons to anyone who wants to look, and yet you still feel drained at the end of the day. You wonder if things will ever be better and if you can be 'full of the joys of spring' again; or even the joys of autumn.

As you sit down at your untidy desk you dread the thought of putting it in order. The task would take days to complete and there never seems to be a spare moment, let alone a spare day to do that. You shy away from throwing out your piles of old medical journals until you've sat down and read them all, or at least skimmed through them. You might chuck away an important article.

Clear the clutter

The 'clutter-clearing' scenario is something you've studiously avoided. Perhaps you've read about how clearing out your unwanted junk can be useful to create a vacuum and so clear a space for other things to happen. But you're always too tired to start doing any of that. Have you been amazed at those television programme participants who allow someone to clear everything out of their house and then put up with the ritual humiliation of having all their possessions scrutinised on air?

Maybe you've wondered how a few tidy drawers can help to find the right job. How indeed? There's something going on, no one understands



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what it is, but it works. Some call it synchronicity or serendipity, others call it good luck or fate or random chance. But whatever it is, it happens. Whether you like it or not, changing one thing in your life enables other things to happen. No doubt, like most of us, you have cupboards and drawers full of old clothes and shoes which you know you will never wear again, or that you'll be slim enough to fit into once more. Dream on!

Life is like a spreadsheet

When you alter one element, everything else automatically adjusts. Be more aware and notice what happens, what starts to come into your life when you create the space. Try clearing a few drawers and watch out for the opportunities which come your way. Hocus pocus? Or metaphysics? Do we have to know how or why something occurs?

If you really want to attract things into your life to be happy and more content, here is the simple formula:

Get rid of what drains you and Do more of what energises you.

Your environment

Home

Consider what you will do now to make it the way you want it. You could start by unpacking and sorting out all the boxes in the attic.

If the furniture is not to your taste, but more what friends and family off-loaded on to you, and the lighting isn't in the right place for what you want to do, then it's time to make some changes. If the temperature is a too hot or too cold, or the colour scheme doesn't make your heart sing, and there is too much clutter lying around, do something about these things.

- How much more can you tolerate?
- How much time can you commit to clearing some papers each day?
- What do you need to do to stop more mess accumulating?

Geographical

Do you live and work where you want to be? If not, have you thought about your ideal environment?

The first step to making any change is imagining what it is that you want. Once you can see it in your mind's eye then it will begin to happen. Involve all your senses. Is your current situation too noisy or too quiet, too urban or too rural? Thinking about where you are, and where you want to be, is a small step you can make now.

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Dr D wants to live by the sea, so in the meantime he makes sure he goes there at least once a month.

Your relationships**Work**

- Do you get on well with your colleagues?
- Do you communicate with them regularly and talk and listen to each other?

If you want something at work can you explain, listen and be heard, and be prepared to try other options.

Personal

- Do you have a happy close relationship?
- Do you listen and talk?
- Do you seek to understand and then be understood?¹
- Do you have friends who nurture rather than drain you?

Community

- Are you part of a supportive community of people who share your interests?
- Do you give and receive support from those who are part of it?

You, the person

- Who are you without the professional label?

Your needs

- What are they?
- Are they being met?

Your values

- Are you living by yours?²

Your body

- Look after yourself³

Money

- Are you earning enough?
- Are you saving for the future?

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- Are you wasting money?
- Can you afford your lifestyle?

Make a list

Note everything you can think of which is draining you. Start with ten things. Expand each by making them very specific. If you have written a person's name establish specifically what it is about that person that annoys you (and use the opportunity to reflect whether what really annoys you about others is actually something in you). Keep adding to your list until you have at least a hundred things on it. Then get rid of everything on the list.

Start with the easy things

For example, you could:

- throw away the broken printer that you know will never get mended
- take all your old medical journals to be recycled
- buy the extra gadget or pair of scissors or screwdriver, so you don't have to spend time looking and trying to remember where you last put it down
- go through your credit card receipts or bank statements regularly
- repair the dripping tap or call a plumber to do it
- pay someone to do the housework
- clear your clutter bit by bit, piece by piece.

Let your heart sing

What would do it for you? Could it be:

- a place you love to go
- music you adore
- friends you haven't seen for ages
- being alone in nature
- special people
- walking in the countryside.

Whatever is your passion, bring it back into your life. You've made excuses long enough. Make time for whatever energises you. Even an hour a week is enough to get you off the treadmill of life to recharge your batteries. Find time to be creative, to be in touch again with who you are and to gain a new perspective on your life.

What's draining you? 65

The outcome will be:

- space for everything
- more energy
- more fun.

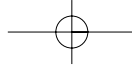
Don't wait any longer.

When you have confidence, you can have a lot of fun. And when you have fun, you can do amazing things.

Joe Namath

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11 Living an abundant life

Abundance is, in large part, an attitude.

Sue Patton Thoele

Abundance and you

Do you think about your life as half empty or half full? Perhaps you are stuck in 'scarcity mode' and avoid making changes in case the barrel of life has no more to offer. If so, you may be nervous about 'letting go' in case you never get a refill.

On the other hand, if you are confident there will always be more than enough to go round, and that closing one door allows others to open, then you appreciate abundance already.

If not, then imagine what it would be like to have a cup of life so full it runs over with contentment, confidence and satisfaction.

What does it mean to live abundantly?

The important parts of your life can be represented on a 'life's wheel'.¹ This is a pie chart divided into equal segments, each representing an area of life that is important for a fulfilled and balanced life.²

Which part of your life has a very low score? Which one takes too much of your energy from the others? What can you do to address this and improve that part of your life that you neglect at present?

It is possible to make a shift from a negative view of the world to a more positive attitude. If you can do this, your 'glass' becomes not only full but overflows and it is possible to have more than you could possibly need.

Are you ready for the challenge?

Start by picturing your ideal circumstances. Imagine someone looking at you living that life. What would they see?

Living an abundant life 67**Time**

Is finding more time a priority? What can you stop doing to free up time to do something you love? What can you say 'no' to? Do you recognise the bonus of extra time if a meeting or trip is cancelled?

Dr A is disappointed at first when she fails to get the consultant job she wants. However, she decides to use the time to travel for a few months instead.

Dr B is ambivalent about whether or not to attend a conference in her own time. She realises that instead of jet lag and exhausting flights she could tidy her office and paint some pictures in the time available.

Money

Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons.

Woody Allen

Is more money the answer? It certainly helps. Do you need to make external or internal changes around money? If you never have enough is this a result of spending beyond your means or buying unnecessarily? Do you make your money work for you or do you work for your money?

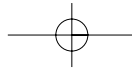
The state of your financial health may derive from your family and their way of life. Are their beliefs relevant to you and your life today? If they feed your feeling of never having enough, how can you change these beliefs? How about making a subtle shift and putting yourself first for a change; each month decide how much is for you to save and how much to spend. Look at what's left and decide which expenses to reduce.³

Money is like a sixth sense without which you cannot make a complete use of the other five.

W Somerset Maugham

Stock up on everything

Start with something easy and useful, for example, household goods (and I'm not joking). Even something as simple as knowing you don't have to buy these items for ages can begin to ease the pressure of thinking about mundane tasks and give you the sense of abundance.⁴



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What else do you have to keep on replacing? Would having more of whatever it is relieve some of the drain on your energy? You see, abundance is about having plenty of energy, space, light, health and friends, as well as time and money. You can work towards having enough of everything. Maybe you need to look at what is 'enough'. Are there adjustments you can make to your lifestyle to allow you to have more of the life you really want? Thinking about what motivates you may help with this.

Give something away

What can you be generous with apart from money? What can you give away – time, love, expertise or friendship? What else? Some people say that what you give returns to you eventually, in some way or another. So by giving, your reserves will grow.

I'd rather have roses on my table than diamonds on my neck.

Emma Goldman

What else?

An abundant life means having more than you need in every aspect of your life. It doesn't depend on the amount of money in the bank. It relies on building resources of everything when you can, so that in lean times you will have stores not only of money but also of time, love, learning, ideas and fun. If you do, you will have the following to look forward to:

- a fulfilled life in and out of medical practice
- money to live the life you want
- time for friends, family, yourself and your community
- love
- learning
- fun and laughter.

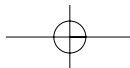
Do you want a more abundant life? How are you improving your life today?

To love what you do and feel that it matters – how could anything be more fun?

Katharine Graham

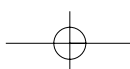
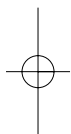
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12 Relationship: what relationship?

*The easiest kind of relationship for me is with ten thousand people.
The hardest is with one.*

Joan Baez

Perhaps there is something about close personal relationships that is particularly difficult for doctors. If you and your partner are both medics, you share an understanding of the reality of working in the medical profession. Your similar education and background may lead to frustration and resentment if one of you is more successful than the other.

Connections

What we're all striving for is authenticity, a spirit-to-spirit connection.

Oprah Winfrey

You might have met when you were both students, two like-minded people who formed, potentially, an ideal partnership. You might both have been working in the same specialty, which sparked your interest in each other. This may have been ideal at that time, although sometimes you may wonder whether it would have been better to have partnered instead with someone as far removed from the medical world as possible.

Coping

If a problem has no solution, it may not be a problem, but a fact – not to be solved, but to be coped with over time.

Shimon Peres

How do you cope with on-call responsibilities, especially when you have young children?

Relationship: what relationship? 71

Dr A, a GP, and her husband Mr B, a surgeon, paid for a babysitter even though one or other of them was usually in the house, in case they were both called out at the same time.

Dr C, another GP, arranged to be on call on different days from her husband Dr D, an anaesthetist, so that one of them could look after the children. This resulted in them never having time together, free from the persistent phone.

Compromise

Relationships of trust depend on our willingness to look not only to our own interests, but also the interests of others.

Peter Farquharson

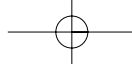
If you find yourself wondering what happened to the person you fell for when you were both students, or worked in the same hospital as junior doctors, and you wonder whether he or she fancies the night sister or charge nurse more than you, then it's time to talk more to each other and work on your relationship.

If your social life is virtually non-existent because one of you has a medical emergency to deal with at the time you were supposed to be going out, or you come home too tired to do anything, maybe it's the moment to have some give and take in both your lifestyles.

If you both expect everything to be organised around you and really wish you had a support team so that life at home would be as straightforward as going into theatre to do an operation, then decide what help you need and organise it or make adjustments to your working hours.

If you are so used to telling others what to do and having your requests carried out without question, and find it exasperating when they refuse to do something at home and regret how quickly you lose your temper, then, maybe, you are bringing home too much of the tension of your day, and you need to find ways to stop doing this.

When you notice how many of your friends and colleagues in similar circumstances have separated or divorced, you realise that unless you both do something soon your relationship may be doomed too.



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Consideration

A little Consideration, a little Thought for Others, makes all the difference.
Pooh's Little Instruction Book, inspired by AA Milne

Accept that home is different from work. Doctors are used to advising people what to do, but they often don't like others directing them. As a doctor you have excellent communication skills. Start to use these to exchange a few words with your partner, rather than being too busy looking after others to make time for your own relationship.

Cooperation

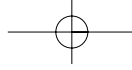
You have both moved on, your career aspirations may not be the same as they were several years ago. Whether or not to have a career break in order to have children may be an issue. Perhaps you have children now and one of you may or may not want to put their career on hold in order to look after them. This is a crunch point – whether being around when your children are small is worth progressing more slowly along your professional path for. You need to cooperate with each other and live to your true values. It's difficult to make up for the years at work which happen when children are small.

Dr Y was so keen on reaching the top of her specialty that she forgot about relationships and having children. When she decided it was the right time she realised her biological clock had been ticking and it was possibly already too late.

Perhaps it's now the moment to make some changes in the way you live. Reflect on your life, think about and try to understand what life is like for your partner.

Think about what the most important thing is for you, whether it is progressing in your career or being with your partner and children. If you've been delaying starting a family until you reach a certain stage, or worrying that you are getting older, then you know it's time to make different decisions.

Whatever has happened in the past has contributed and enriched your life in one way or another. There is always something positive to learn from every experience, however negative it seems at the time. If you've been unlucky in your close relationships, please take a moment to consider what you have learned to help you do better next time.



Relationship: what relationship? 73

Communication

The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.

Peter Drucker

It's important for better communication to listen twice as much as to talk to your partner and recall when you last had a fun time together. Successful relationships depend on a number of things:

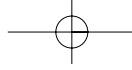
- being clear about boundaries
- letting go of trying to control someone else
- respecting your needs may be different from theirs
- realising that you are a worthwhile person in your own right – your partner is too
- finding areas of common interest
- doing what you love to do and letting your partner do whatever gives them joy
- saying no this week to things you no longer want to do
- taking time to do something with your partner that you both enjoy.

Dr X realised that he and his wife, Dr Y, only ever spoke to each other about domestic matters. He remembered how much they used to enjoy walking in the countryside together near their home. He made a decision to ask her to have a long walk with him at the weekend. She was very pleased to do that and it was an opportunity to talk again.

Take time also to do something you really enjoy, without your partner. Remember what life was like before you were a 'doctor's partner' and try to recapture that feeling again. Go on, indulge yourself! Don't make any more excuses about why you can't do this. Make a start today with something, however small.

What you risk reveals what you value.

Jeanette Winterson



13 Top ten tips for achieving your goals

To will is to select a goal, determine a course of action that will bring one to that goal, and then hold to that action till the goal is reached. The key is action.

Michael Hanson

1 Make your goal SPECIFIC

If your goals are too vague, it's difficult to know what you are trying to achieve. Some amazing goals aren't reachable because they are too vague. If your goal, for example, is 'I want to be happier', ask yourself the following questions.

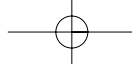
- Happier than what?
- What does being happier mean to you?
- What will you be doing when you are happier?
- How will you recognise yourself as happier?

It's a great goal but not specific enough. If you connect being happier with, let's say, spending time with your family, then a specific goal from this might be 'I want to spend an afternoon each week with my family'.

If you are happy when you go to the cinema then you might say to yourself, 'My goal is to go to the cinema once each week'.

2 Make your goal MEASURABLE

How will you know when you've achieved your goal? This follows from making your goal specific. If you decide to get a new job, then you either have or haven't got a new job. It's 'measurable'. If you decide to run in a marathon next year, then you will know when you've done it. If however you decide to be happier it's more difficult to measure 'happier' or to know if you've achieved it.



Top ten tips for achieving your goals 75

3 Make your goal **ACHIEVABLE**

Is your goal something that you are capable of doing? For example, if you are an overweight, unfit 80-year-old and you decide your goal is to win a gold medal for running at the next Olympics, then perhaps that is not an achievable goal.

4 Make your goal **REALISTIC**

If you are a lightweight woman and your goal is to lift a bus on to your shoulders, then your goal is not realistic.

5 Give your goal a **TIME-SCALE**

It is very important for your goal to be timed. You may decide that by the end of the year you want to lose a certain amount of weight. So decide on a date by which time you will achieve this.

6 Write down your goals

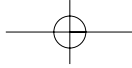
There is a story about a group of college students who were asked, when they graduated, to write down what they wanted to achieve in their lives. It is said that when they were contacted some years later those that had clear goals were more likely to have achieved them. Whether this is true or not, keeping a written record of your goals gives you something to refer to in the future, and a way to assess how your life is going and whether you still want the same as you did years ago. It's OK to make changes as you grow and your life evolves!

7 Decide the first steps

Work out what you want to achieve in the next six months, the next three months, the next month, the next week, in order to get to the goal in, for example, a year's time.

8 Keep a journal

Write something each day. Write your thoughts and feelings. Just let your hand move across the page (flow of consciousness writing). Don't censor what you write and don't re-read it immediately or correct it. As time goes by you will learn how this process frees up your mind to be much more creative and you may find that you have ideas about how to progress or how to move out of a stuck situation.



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9 Do something, however small, each day

The way to get things done is to make a start and take action. Even five or ten minutes a day contributes to the whole and is a better technique than waiting for some 'never to arrive day' when you might have plenty of time.

10 Celebrate your achievement

If you follow these tips, you will achieve your goals. Tell yourself how well you've done and do something special to celebrate your success.

YOU CAN DO IT!!

