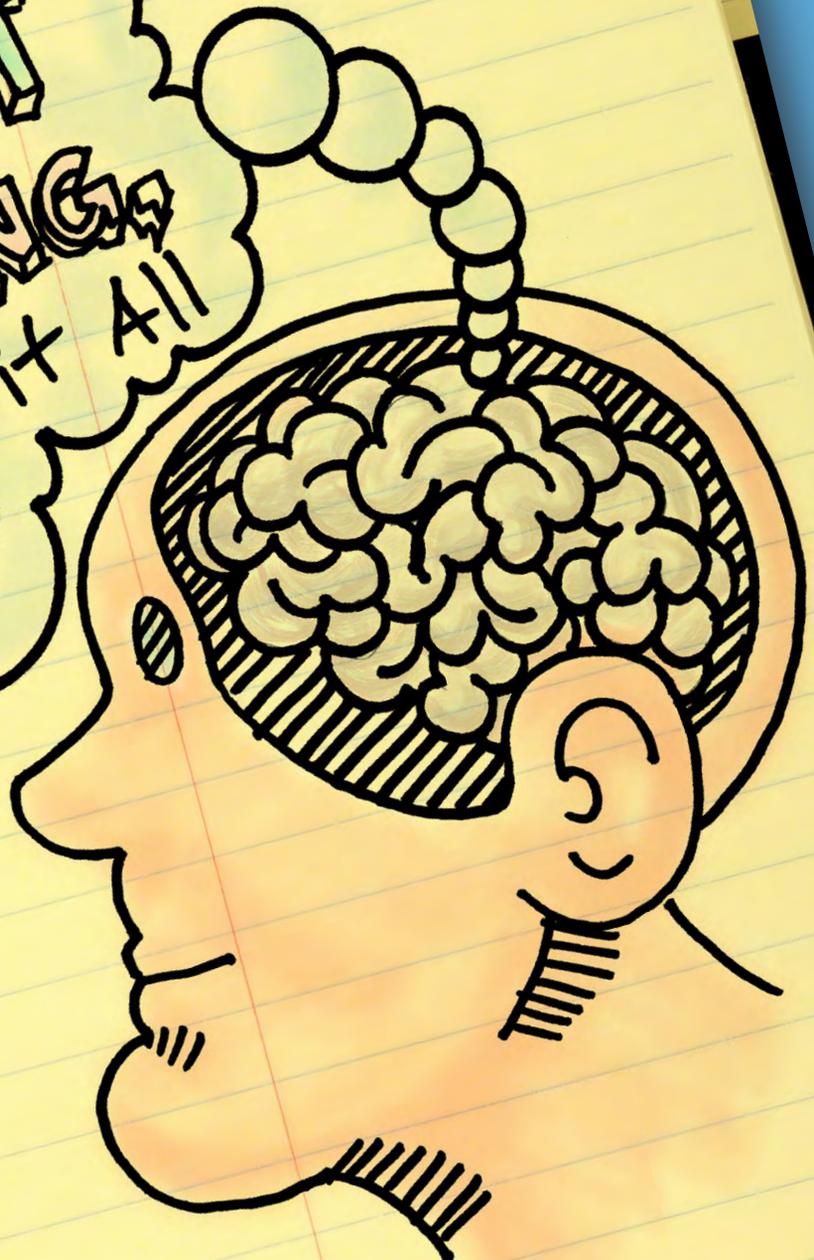


**FORGET  
PLANNING**  
I've Got it All  
Right up  
Here...



Is planning  
**A WASTE OF TIME?**

By Steve McClatchy

Imagine that there is a new legal pad on the market. It's brand new and it just hit the store shelves. It has this amazing ability, at random times, to instantly bring back to your attention things that you forgot to do in the past. Pretty neat... but there are a couple of quirks. First, you can never predict when it's going to work and when it's not and whatever it brings back to your attention, it's often too late to do anything about it. The second quirk is that it can only hold one task at a time. When you write down a second task on your list the first task that you wrote down disappears. When you write down a third task the second disappears, and so on.

How long do you think this legal pad would last on the market? Not very long, because it would do more harm than good. It would do more to cause you stress and frustration in your life than peace and success. I created this imaginary legal pad to make a point. Many people have chosen this exact tool to help them manage their time. It's called the human brain. Have you ever, after an exhausting day, gotten into bed to enjoy a good night's sleep and after laying there for just two minutes, just like the new legal pad, something you forgot to do three weeks ago pops into your head? Oh, that's helpful. Just before you drift off into fantasyland your brain decides it's a great time to bring this forgotten task to your attention. Not only does it feel like you were just hit with a bolt of lightning, it's at a time when you are least able to do anything about it.

Have you ever gotten up to go get something in another room and when

you arrived in that room thought to yourself "why did I come in here?" It seems to have happened to all of us. How can your brain forget what it was thinking just eight seconds ago? What happened was that on your way into that other room you thought of something else and as a result the reason you got up disappeared, just like on the legal pad that can only hold one task at a time. Have you ever taken a vitamin or aspirin and then forgot whether or not you had taken it? Have you ever taken a shower and shampooed twice because you couldn't remember if you had already done it? Have you ever gone to the grocery store and gotten everything but the one thing you went to get? How could your brain do this to you? Sometimes I wonder whether it's working with us or against us. If you saw your brain on the shelf of a retail store you would not buy it and yet it's the tool that most people rely on to manage their life.

Taking the time to write something down is a chore that takes effort and discipline as well as time. The conundrum is that it is very effective. When you plan your day in writing and run your day from the plan you are much more effective than when you do not. We have all planned a

day and we have all gone through a day just winging it. There is a real difference in the results you get when you have a written plan that considers your discretionary and non-discretionary time. In this article I will highlight five benefits of taking just five minutes a day to make a written plan.

### 1. You Don't Forget Anything

When you have a list of fifteen things written down you no longer have to remember fifteen things. The only thing you have to remember is the list. This is a great stress-reducer. It allows your mind to focus on the task at hand, it prevents details from falling through the cracks and it prevents lightning bolts from striking you when you climb into bed for a good night's sleep.

### 2. You Get More Done

Do you find that one of the most productive weeks of your life is the week before you go on vacation? The reason we are so productive is not only because of the energy that comes from the excitement of an upcoming break but it is also the week that everyone seems to keep a list. Even people you know that never keep lists seem to keep one the week before they go on a vacation. Why? Because you don't have any time to waste. When you don't have a list the transition time between tasks is much longer.

Have you ever completed a task and while pondering what to do next you were interrupted...by your own thoughts? The human body has what I like to call check in points. When there is a break in the action your body starts to influence what you think about. If it's hungry and/or thirsty it will remind you to get food and water. If you're tired or exhausted it will remind you to get some rest (or caffeine). If it's bored it will remind you of fun times from your past and encourage you to daydream or get up and be social. If it has to go to the bathroom then there you go. These check-in points happen throughout the day during your downtimes or transition times. When you are focused on a task or headstrong into a project or goal your body follows your lead and seems to leave you alone. I have been so focused on a project at times that for twenty-four hours I did not eat, sleep or even go to the bathroom. Going to this extreme is, of course, not always necessary but the point is that when you have a list you can keep your focus, you don't give your mind time to wander, you lessen transition time between tasks and leave no time to get distracted.

### 3. You Can Better Recover From Interruptions

So armed with a plan you can manage to keep your own brain on a short leash but how about dealing with the inevitable interruptions and distractions that come from working with other people? Have you

ever had an interruption take you so far off your plan that you never actually returned to what you were doing? Interruptions are a part of life and are not always bad things. Important matters can come to your attention by way of an interruption. However, the real time lost is often the time it takes to return to exactly what you were doing before the interruption happened. When you are working your day from a list and you are interrupted, no matter how long the interruption takes, your recovery time is seconds. All you have to do is refer back to the list to get refocused.

#### 4. You Make Better Decisions

I often get asked when is the best time to plan, in the morning, in the evening, at lunch time. The best time is the time that works best for you. If you are a morning person then plan in the morning. If you are an evening person then plan in the evening. If lunch time is your time then plan at lunch. The key is to plan the next twenty-four hours of your life and my strong advice is always plan before you check email and voice mail not after.

Email and voice mail, by their very nature, are other people bringing things to your attention. I don't think anyone has ever become wildly successful by just doing what other people brought to their attention. Voice mail and email put you into a mindset that is focused on other people's agendas. When we start the planning process with what others want from us, it's hard to get out of that mindset. So what's my advice? Plan before you check email and voice mail and only adjust the plan if necessary afterward. I understand it is usually necessary to respond to other people and get them what they are looking for, however, when we start the day with giving away our productive time, we often end there as well and don't get to address our own important agenda. Prioritize the tasks that come from these sources and work them into your plan accordingly so you don't wind up spending your most valuable productive time on something less important to you.

What happens if, once you have planned the perfect day, you go on to check voice mail and email and there is actually an urgent matter that requires your immediate attention? When this happens having the plan will help you make better decisions. When you have a plan you can weigh the voice mail matter against your plan and decide what is the best use of your time. If you didn't have a plan, that voice mail, as compelling as it is, is not being considered against anything else. When you don't have something to weigh your decisions against everything seems to have top priority. When you have a plan you can see it for what it really is and make the right decision.

#### 5. You're Proactive, Not, Reactive

To me, being reactive means letting deadlines drive your decision making. Up until you reach the deadline associated with a task you have the ability to choose the best time for the task to get completed. When you reach the point when you are as far out from the deadline as the task itself is going to take, you have lost your freedom to decide when to do it. The task and the deadline have now made the decision for you, and you are no longer in control. How do you feel when you are not in control? How do you feel when your next task is being dictated to you? If you're like me, it's far from feeling motivated and far from a desire to do your best work. It's often work that includes a touch of resentment and regret. There is certainly a lot of energy and excitement involved with waiting until the last minute but I never find it to be worth the anxiety, fear, stress and wasted time that leads up to it.

Being proactive, on the other hand, means you still have a choice. You could do it now or at another time. Even if the task is an unpleasant one, it feels better when you are in control of the decision. Planning your day puts you into the proactive mode. It allows you to decide the best time for something to get done before the deadline makes the decision for you. It also allows you to group like tasks together to save time and deal with the unexpected. One of the biggest benefits of planning is that it puts you in control. When you are in control you feel a lot more energized and motivated and feeling like that directly impacts your productivity and the quality of your work.

Many people say that when you fail to plan, you plan to fail. I don't necessarily agree. We have all gone through an unplanned day without failing at anything at all. But did we have our best day? We also have all had days when we were very busy but felt like we got nothing done. This is the more likely outcome of a day without a plan. There are plenty of things to keep you busy when you don't have a plan. To have a day where you feel like you accomplished what you wanted, you have to plan for it.

The crises and time crunches in our lives that leave us feeling overworked and stressed out are often created by us making a commitment and never writing it down, saying yes before we checked the plan, or procrastinating precious time away. Take five minutes right now and think about the next twenty-four hours of your life and create a plan in writing.

Planning is not a waste of time and I promise that if you invest just five minutes each day it will return a lot more than five minutes and be well worth it.

**Steve McClatchy** is the president of Alleer Training & Consulting a provider of training, consulting and speaking services in the areas of Consultative Selling, Time Management and Leadership. If you would like to learn more about the ways Alleer can be a resource to your organization email [Steve.McClatchy@Alleer.com](mailto:Steve.McClatchy@Alleer.com) or call 1-800-860-1171.

Don't miss the  
**IFEA's 58th Annual  
Convention & Expo,**  
September 16-18, 2013  
in Pittsburgh, PA  
with **Steve McClatchy**  
as our  
**Opening Keynote Speaker**  
as he presents:  
**"Your Event; Your Life;  
Your Decisions."**

What shapes an event leader's outcomes, career and life? Their decisions. Decisions bridge our visions with our successes. The criteria that we all use for making decisions drives our performance - and our effectiveness as leaders. Great decision-making habits yield a lifetime of achievements and success. Poor habits keep us stressed, frustrated and forever out of balance. Join us as we welcome back IFEA's consistently highest rated speaker, Steve McClatchy, in this important keynote session for every leader and aspiring leader in your organization and our industry.