

PUBLICATION

Time Saver Savvy – Helpful Tips for the Busy Professional

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A colleague and I took a seminar on time management for working mothers some 20 years ago. We met each other at the hotel conference room, rushing in at the last minute just as did every other woman in attendance – approximately 300 women with pen in hand anxiously awaiting to learn how to more easily manage their lives. You could almost feel the anticipation in the room, which was filled to maximum occupancy with professional women, each one in search of the "magic" to do it all.

A cacophony of high pitched squeaks as the women took their spots among the metal folding chair and voices mumbling, "excuse me," were the only audible sounds in the room. Then it dawned on me that these women were purposefully not making eye contact. The registration table supplied no name tags, no networking breaks in the program agenda and no refreshments. It was a room full of women who all appeared somewhat uncomfortable or shamefaced in body language or facial expression. There was concern that a woman's attendance could be perceived as a negative because, by merely attending, each woman was making a one sentence silent confession, first to herself, and then symbolically screaming out to the others, "I cannot keep it all together."

The speaker began and you could have dropped a pin in the room as each woman, with pen in hand, readied herself to learn the magic of being woman, wife, mother, partner, daughter, sister...yearning to achieve and maintain that "perfect balance" thought to truly symbolize "success" in each area of their lives. It was not enough to be an educated woman working as a lawyer, or the mother of two healthy boys, or the daughter of parents that Tom Brokaw identified as "the greatest generation," or being married to a hands-on dad. Seemingly "having it all" still left me lacking for something, in that I also wanted to have it all run perfectly. And for a few hours of my time, which was a major decision to begin with, and a registration fee which I paid for myself because I could not possibly have my employer see me as lacking, I was ready to take notes and learn the magic!

Sadly, such was not the case, as the speaker began by chastising us for "wanting it all" and told us that we have no one to blame but ourselves for any discord in our lives while running ourselves ragged in trying to keep every aspect of our lives afloat. At that moment, audible sounds resonated as pens dropped to tablets and audible gasps ensued filling the room.

My message is simple in that there is no magic to existing in today's world without experiencing the anxiety that comes with feeling overwhelmed from time to time. And yes, as a mentor once told me, "things will be missed, but it is how you handle what was missed that matters." We no longer have to rely upon handwritten calendars for planning and scheduling. Technology abounds in reminding us of every client meeting, personal appointments, the school play and so on. Yet the anxiety and exhaustion remains, and for many, the detailed time management only serves to impose more stress as it is constantly in our faces.

I did learn something from that seminar that I still practice today: open your mail over the recycle bin. It helps to alleviate those piles of junk that seem to hang around forever and it is somewhat freeing. At home, I do this on the way back from the mailbox, keeping junk mail from ever entering the house. At work, I do the same with snail mail and I try to scan it to myself as quickly as possible to discard hard copies that need not be retained. Just as with the old handwritten planners, the information you scan and store is only as good as your ability to

retrieve it when needed. So, right clicking to make a new folder with a label meaningful to you takes care of that. Drag the scans into the folder, and if you take the time to rename the scan you will be able to locate it more quickly in a keyword search.

If you copy your folders to the cloud, you will always have access to them, as only an Internet connection is necessary. In this way you are not relying on a third-party program, such as Citrix, to access your company documents. This has saved me time and time again in being able to retrieve information from files not in hand. I am a syncing maniac, syncing my calendar with my phone, my computer, the cloud, my iPad and my personal computer. I also record family appointments in addition to business matters. This way I am better able to schedule a client meeting when I first identify the need without the added steps of emailing back and forth or exchanging telephone calls, and I can avoid scheduling a settlement conference right after a personal appointment leaving no time to prepare. Having it all synced everywhere alleviates wasted time and energy in agonizing over what I may have forgotten. And I must confess that I use the calendar/appointment request process to make my husband aware of school events and family appointments so that these things are forced to be on his radar, regardless of which one of us is "covering" the activity. I find this to be very helpful in alleviating much of the frustration surrounding marital communications, because "it's on your calendar" sounds much better than "I told you three times. How could you forget?"

Most importantly, don't beat yourself up for mishaps. They happen to all of us. We are not machines. I suggest working to find peace within yourself as "things will be missed, but it is how you handle what was missed that matters." Let go of the past and work on strategies to handle what may be missed in the future.