

of Women Who Get Things Done

by

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Most of us are busier than ever, yet wish we got more done.

Maybe you've felt that way before. You work non-stop, but at the end of the day, very little was checked off your to-do list.

If you're a mom of small children, you probably know that feeling well. Little ones have a different set of needs than we do, and they often conflict. And most of the time, the needs of our children take priority.

With this common perspective on our workload, we tend to respond in one of two ways:

1) Maintain a simmering sense of frustration at the obstacles keeping us from getting things done.

When frustration rules, people become problems. Their needs, wants, questions and issues all seem to come at the wrong time – regardless of when that is. Really, there's no good time for interruptions when we are feeling overwhelmed.

It can even begin to feel like there's a conspiracy against us getting work done. And that adds to the frustration.

As a result, the ones we love, and are doing all this work for anyway, feel the brunt of that frustration. We can become impatient, saying or doing things we regret. And that's not good.

There's another common response when we feel overwhelmed ...

2) Give up and pay the price later for what doesn't get done.

Some people have a different response to an overflowing to-do list. They decide it doesn't matter and do something else more rewarding.

Justification helps overcome a sense of guilt. After all, life is short. It's more important to enjoy time with those we love now, when we don't know what tomorrow brings.

This can be a wise, fun choice. Sometimes we do need to set it all aside and spend time doing something other than work.

However, when this becomes a habit, the fun can negatively impact others. People who need to depend on you, can't. The costs mount. Resentment builds. And our most important relationships can weaken.

What if I told you there was another way? Did you know that productive women do things differently?

They are just like you and me. They have families, chores, jobs, friends and goals. And yet they don't live with a series of regrets, missed opportunities and wounded relationships.

It is possible to live a life of priorities and balance. We can know when to work and know when to stop. We can fully engage with projects and people.

That's the life I want. One that's productive in all the best ways. You see, I don't want to get more done. I want to get more of the right things done.

They key is changing some of our habits. We don't need a life overhaul to see a difference. We can start making small adjustments in our day and we'll immediately start to see changes.

Highly productive, priority-driven women do things differently. They aren't smarter or more focused than you. They've just got different habits. Habits you can easily adapt.

That's what I want to share with you. Five habits you can develop that will help you get more done. Let me clarify ... more of the right things done.

That's what we all want. Isn't it? I don't want to check 100 useless things off my list. I want to live an effective, meaningful life. One that brings honor and glory to my Heavenly Father, and shows love to others. It's really kind of simple when you look at it that way.

Want to join me? Here are 5 easy habits to start adapting today.





I'm sure you've got a to-do list. Most of us do. But do you just have one? Where is it? On the back of an envelope? On 50 sticky notes? Or is it lost on the counter underneath stacks of mail?

Women who get things done know the value of lists. And these women prioritize keeping track of their lists. Whether it's on paper or digital, it's important to manage your lists.

Lists serve two key purposes for women who get things done:

1) They are a safe place

My memory is bad. And it's always been like that, so I can't blame age. Once I had an idea for a devotion to write, and I remember thinking, "This is such a great idea. I don't need to write it down, because I will never forget it."

Aaarrgghh! I should never be that boastful, because I never remembered the idea!

Multiply that experience by about a gazillion, and eventually I accepted my reality: There is nothing too important that I can't forget it. Seriously.

So lists have become my "safe place." Everything I need to do and remember gets put on a list. Just knowing it's all written down alleviates stress for me. I don't feel that underlying anxiety I'm going to forget something.

Then, once I've got everything captured on lists ...

2) They help create a plan

I don't need to guess at what needs to be done, I just review my lists. So every day I can identify my priorities for that day, and craft a plan of attack.



We will never drift into managing time well. Taking time to plan our priorities for the day or week brings focus and clarity. Rather than feeling overwhelmed, I only pick 4 or 5 things to do that day or week. The rest of my work is safely recorded on a list.

Spontaneity and unscheduled times are important. Time with those we love is critical. But when we need to get things done, we need a list and a plan.

Practical tip:

Use a list app to create lists for all kinds of things. I use Wunderlist. The beauty of this app is you can share a list with someone. I have shopping lists for all the stores I visit, restaurants I want to try, movies I want to see and so on. When my sons moved into an apartment last year, I started a to-do list for them that we all shared.

Habit #2



One critical habit of highly productive women is they say "no" to more than they say "yes."

My friend Karen gets a lot done, but lives her priorities more than anyone I know. People often ask her how she gets so much done. Her answer, "You don't see what I don't do."

There are unlimited opportunities to fill our days with busy work. And without a grid for making decisions, we can easily over-commit to things that aren't important to us. But women who get things done, know how to say "no" to things that will distract their focus and steal energy from their priorities.

I propose that highly productive women might look like they are doing more than the rest of the population, but in reality, they are doing less. It's just they are doing less better.

Every "yes"
to one choice
is actually
also a "no" to
something else.

Very few of us are locked in to our crazy schedules. It's just there are a thousand reasons why we can't say "no." So we pile more on to our plates until we are a mess.

Here's what we forget: Every "yes" to one choice is actually also a "no" to something else.

Doing less better is a habit that will take time to develop. We need to review our lives and like an editor, strikethrough those elements that don't enhance the beauty and purpose of our lives.

Here are three steps to do less better:

Know your priorities. What's really important to you? What has God asked you to do? How are you doing in those areas? Make a list of the top 5 most important things in your life and make sure all your decisions support those priorities, not sacrifice them.

Edit your schedule. Once you've identified your priorities, you'll easily see what doesn't fit. You might need to resign from a committee or step down from a responsibility. Do this in an honorable way that doesn't leave people in a difficult position.

Guard your priorities. Once you've got a manageable life, be ruthless in saying "no" to new opportunities. You're heart will say "that won't take much time," but your mind needs to say "Overruled!"

Feeling like we've never done our best is draining. Once your capacity matches your responsibilities, you'll be amazed at how much better you'll feel.

Practical tip:

Have you heard of a dream board? Why not create a Priority Board and display it. This might include photos of people you love, images that represent your goals, words that reflect what's most important. Then, when tempted to say "yes" to something, take a few minutes and look at your Priority Board. If it fits there, it's a "yes." If not, it's an easy "no."



Reorder your work

Have you ever had an important project or goal to accomplish that you just can't get to? Every day you have the best intentions to start, but evening rolls around and you transfer it to the next day's agenda.

Usually the work I *put off* is my best work. The work I *fill my days with* is busy work.

Busy work looks different than it did years ago. It used to be mindless work, like stuffing envelopes or filing out forms. Today busy work looks important, but it's not our best work. Usually it's someone else's work that dictates our daily schedule.

There's been a cultural shift in the past 10 years that silently affects us all. We wake up and immediately start *responding*. We answer emails, texts, private messages. Before we know it, our day is filled. And our best energy and effort has been given to other people's projects.

We have things upside down! The things that matter least replace the things that matter most in our schedules.

If you are nodding your head right now, may I suggest an alternative approach? Rather than start your day on busy work, get in the habit of spending the first part of your day on *your* priorities. This involves the simple habit of reordering our work.



Resist the urges to knock out some of the small tasks so you can focus on a big task. That doesn't work. By the time you get to your best work, you will have depleted your focus and willpower to tackle it.

Maybe you're like me and emails are a big part of your day. When I've got a big project due, I can't get sucked into the email vortex. It's a black hole!

If you must check email in the morning, just scan them for emergencies. But don't respond unless it's a true emergency.

We teach people what to expect from us. And if we reserve our mornings for our priorities, people will know to wait on our response.

Practical Tip:

Establish an auto-response that says "Thank you for your email. I'll be back in touch with you as soon as I'm able." That honors the sender, confirms the receipt and puts you in control of the response.

Habit #4

Design smart routines

For years, mornings were crazy in the Whitwer house. At the time, we had three school-age boys who didn't share my commitment to timeliness.

They dawdled, argued with each other, struggled to make decisions, and consistently couldn't find something they needed for school. From the moment they got up, to the moment they rushed out the door, our mornings were chaos.

I tried various tactics to gain their compliance. I offered stickers, beads in a jar and of course, a mom's last resort, threats to take away video games. Nothing worked.

Until I developed two routines: 1) Night and 2) Morning.

These routines were specific and I assigned times for everything. The night routine included time to gather necessary items for the next day, brush teeth, put on pajamas and be in bed. The morning routine included time to wake up, eat breakfast and get dressed, plus other daily tasks.

I was shocked when it worked. My kids (and I) were craving structure. We just didn't realize it.

Since then, I've come to realize the power of a routine. After time, the routine becomes automatic. You can't imagine *not* doing it. And when something is automatic, you reserve mental energy, saving it for when it's really needed.

Plus, you save time. You don't have to think about what to do next. You easily move from one task to the other. Imagine a ballet dancer wondering which move comes next. There's a gracefulness that starts to happen ... and we all need grace.



What's your meltdown moment of the day? When do you feel the least productive? Can you design a routine that might take the guesswork out? Here are 4 steps to get you started.

Practical Tip:

To create a effective routine:

- · Write down every task that needs to be done in order to accomplish your goal.
- · Identify how long each task takes (allowing extra time).
- Put those tasks in an order that makes sense to you.
- Finally, assign a time for each task (For example, 7:30 am Eat Breakfast).

Habit #5

Finish what you start

I had a bad habit of leaving things undone. Oh, I intended to get to them ... I just didn't.

It wasn't usually the big things in life. Those had deadlines, and although I procrastinated, finishing in a frenzy, the deadline enforced the completion of the project.

It was more the daily things of life I didn't like to finish. Things like putting away dishes or folding clothes. My ironing baskets (yes, there were multiple) overflowed, until I called my mom for help. You name it, I didn't finish it completely.



Although it was a problem, I always had an external excuse.
Usually it was the kids. (I'm still blaming them for the 20 pounds I can't seem to lose)

Only one day, I couldn't blame it on my children any more. They didn't have any influence on why I draped my robe over the bathtub rather than hang it up – every day.

That day, however, I stopped before walking out of the bathroom. It finally hit me that the hook in the closet (where I hang my robe) was only three steps away. If I had given two more seconds worth of effort, my robe would have been hung up.

So I picked up my robe and hung it up. The next day as I caught myself tossing my robe on the tub yet again, I walked the three steps and hung it up. Every day I consciously overrode my instinct to drop my robe until it became a habit.

You know when you finally become aware of something and see it everywhere? Like when you get a white car and suddenly "everyone" has a white car? That's what happened to me, only it was my tendency to stop short of finishing. I realized it was a habit I'd developed. Maybe you've got the same bad habit.

The best role model we have for finishing well is Jesus. After a long day of walking and ministry, the disciples wanted to get Him food. Ever the teacher, Jesus used that moment to express the life-giving value of obedience:

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34, NIV).

Developing the habit of finishing well in the small things, prepares us to finish well in the bigger things. This not only impacts our ability to manage our daily tasks, but it prepares us to obey God when He gives us a challenging assignment.

Interestingly, it's actually been somewhat easy to address this issue. I admit the tendency within myself to settle, and I get firm with myself about it. Now, when I think "I'll do that later," I say to myself, "Finish what you start."

I make a conscientious decision to finish the task at hand before I move on to something new.

The discipline of finishing well needs to be is woven through our lives. Or else it will always hold us back from our potential.

The good news is we can develop it within ourselves by starting small. Just pick one unfinished task and complete it. Then do it again. And again. Until you've developed the habit. Then switch to something else.

It's one more stitch in this tapestry of finishing well that God is trying to create in our lives.

Practical Tip:

Pick one task in your home you tend to put off. Maybe it's finishing the dinner dishes, sorting through mail or picking up dirty clothes. Commit to finishing that one task for the next week, every day.



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