

## Planned Productivity

By Kim Dannies

“I don’t know where we are going, but we’re making great time!” -Yogi Berra

Do you feel like you are busy all the time? Is this activity effectively leading you towards your coveted goals? Or are you stuck in a joyless cycle, simply reacting to the urgency of daily demands? Although it may seem counterintuitive, less activity can often be more productive. Your car’s steering wheel will teach you this lesson everyday.

Try something new in 2006: spend 70% of your time planning strategically and tactically, and only 30% of your time executing work assignments, household chores, commitments, and errands. You’ll be amazed at the efficiency and powerful momentum you will create. Think respond as in calm, cool execution vs. react: simply spinning your wheels.

- Begin with a strategic plan: take an overview of your goals and state appropriate time targets for achieving each one. Next, write a tactical plan. Break each goal down into action steps, using a paper or electronic calendar, detailing each week, and day, what you should be doing. Include research: resources, contact information, budgets, directions, quotes, or any other information you sourced during your planning time. Consider new possibilities and think a few moves ahead, make a game out of this— it’s fun! At the end of each workday, review and refine the next day’s action plan. It should make your spine tingle.
- Look for patterns of tasks that can be clustered for execution. For example, I’ll do several writing assignments on the same day. Drafts are planned out, I wake up my writer’s muse, open up stacks of word documents, and bounce between projects, each one infusing the next. I’m in the writing mode, and the quality of work is improved by synergy; results are guaranteed because the deadlines are planned.
- Harness physical and mental energy. Forecast and schedule clients in logical geographic locations, by core industry, or product. If I see that I am working with a banker or broker on a certain day, I’ll schedule bankers or brokers all day. Entrepreneurs booked? Then I’ll be vetting business plans all day. This kind of planning paves the way for intense focus and fluency. The quality of this networked energy is called “operating in the zone” and it is addictive.

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- Planning works with domestic life, too. Consolidate a week's worth of home management into the first day of the workweek. Groceries, multiple-meal prep, kids' appointments, service calls, and cleaning help: all executed on Mondays. The result? Clock-hogging errands and distractions are streamlined, and I go to work focused and confident, efficiently compressing a week's worth of work. Weekends are for play and recovery. (Note: Many work environments do not yet support this kind of scheduling discretion, but try it even once a month, you'll be hooked. Managers: please experiment!)
- Pay bills online, but prep snail mail weekly. Buy birthday, thank you, and condolence cards in bulk and create a monthly system for mailing greetings to clients and friends. The simple efficiency of this thoughtful gesture will create a ripple effect of lasting connection for everyone.

The 70%-30% planning formula is a power tool that enables people to feel positive about multiple roles, yet sometimes I'll hear fear in a client's voice when the topic of planning comes up. Some will mask their apprehension with a comment like: "I'd rather be spontaneous." Planning does not require you to be rigid: it helps you to forecast better, compress time, and take control of your schedule. You'll learn to create not only tactical Plan A, but contingency plans B, & C will naturally evolve too, making you very flexible, indeed.

I think it's fair to say that most people wish they had more time — yet we have all there is. It's your choice to respect this finite currency and to plan for it carefully. In doing so, I guarantee that you will have more discretionary time, more positive energy, and be far more spontaneous in more meaningful ways than you ever imagined.

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