

The Highly Effective Woman

That One Room!

by Carolyn Mahaney

There is one room in my house that I really don't like. I avoid the room. I keep its door shut. And it is certainly not a room I want any guests to see. (Thus no picture of it on this blog.) This room happens to be my office.

Now my disdain for this room is not because of the room color – the morning moon yellow paint on the walls and the periwinkle blue chaise lounge with throw pillows that tie the two colors together are certainly warm and cheery enough. And though I desire to replace my dark wood desk and corresponding bookshelves with white furniture someday (a better match with yellow and periwinkle blue, in my opinion), I am fully content with this furniture for now. What is it then that I so dislike about my office?

This room has become the “dump all” room of the house. That means whenever I receive mail, miscellaneous papers, or any other item that I can't give immediate attention to, I take them to my office rather than allowing them to clutter any other part of the house. Now it is always my intent to return to the office when time allows and attend to whatever it is I have dumped there. However, time often *doesn't* allow, and consequently my office has become “the grand central cluttered room” of the Mahaney house. And since I don't like clutter, I *really* don't like this room.

Well, guess what I did between Christmas and the New Year? I tackled the job of de-cluttering my office. And now at long last, I like my office again. In fact, I'm enjoying it so much, I'm writing this post sitting on my periwinkle blue chaise lounge.

It's that time of year when many of us attempt to get more organized. We seek to establish better strategies for determining our priorities and managing our time. We head off to *Franklin Covey* to purchase our new “Seasons” calendar in hopes of effectively planning out our year. And it is for that reason we thought it would be a good month to talk about time management and organizational practices.

However, before we consider any practical topic, there are 3 all-important truths we must keep before us. And I'm pretty sure you won't find these in any time-management course or organizational book. They are...

1. The source of our justification
2. The source of our ability
3. The source of our motivation

These are biblical truths that must support, inform, and direct all our planning and organizing. I'll share more on these three truths in the coming days direct from my blue chaise lounge in my newly organized morning moon yellow room.

Time Management and Justification

by Carolyn Mahaney

In yesterday's post, we informed you that we will be talking about time management and organization this month. We also referenced 3 all-important truths we must keep before us whenever we consider practical topics. So today we want to discuss the first of these 3 truths: **The source of our justification.**

No doubt, many of you who read about my disorderly office yesterday were thinking: *this woman could use some help organizing her home.* I agree! I need to manage my time more efficiently and develop better organizational practices.

However, I also know about me that whenever I become aware of areas where I need to grow and change--stewardship of time being one of them--I'm susceptible to legalism. (If you're not familiar with this word, here is a definition my husband uses: Legalism is seeking to achieve forgiveness from God and acceptance by God through obedience to God.)

Here's how legalism can progress in my life using stewardship of time as an illustration: If I become a better time manager, I think God approves of me. I tend to approach the throne of grace with confidence. However, when I fritter away my time or give in to laziness, I can feel God disapproves. He's not happy with me. And I often want to avoid approaching God's throne until I get my act together. It happens subtly and can even go undetected in my life for awhile. But relating to God in this way is an egregious error.

We must remember that our justification is never based on our performance! We are justified through grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ

alone. Therefore our acceptance before God does not depend on our performance. Or more specifically, we do not earn or forfeit our justification before God based on how we manage our time or how we organize our lives and homes.

So let's preach the gospel to ourselves and experience the effect of the gospel by considering this quote by B. B. Warfield:

“There is nothing in us or done by us, at any stage of our earthly development, because of which we are acceptable to God. We must always be accepted for Christ's sake, or we cannot be accepted at all. This is not true of only when we believe. It is just as true after we have believed. It will continue to be true as long as we live.... It is always on His 'blood and righteousness' alone that we can rest.”

Therefore how we manage our time has no bearings on the basis of our justification. Being organized does not contribute to our acceptance before God; it does not earn for us forgiveness from God. As believing sinners we are declared to be just—only and always because of Christ and his finished work.

All our pursuit of growth and change must be anchored in the justifying grace of God.

Time Management and Dependence

by Carolyn Mahaney

Not only do I have a tendency toward legalism (see yesterday's post), I can often submit to the sin of self-sufficiency--living independently of God. I will go about my day making decisions, performing actions, and interacting with others, all the while neglecting to consult the Lord for His guidance and direction.

What absurdity such behavior displays! How foolish to think that I can successfully pull off anything apart from God's help, guidance and direction. It is for this reason that I need to be continually reminded of ***the source of my ability***. This is the second all-important truth we need to keep before us when considering the topic of time management and organization.

We can fill our shelves with every time management and organizational book available today. And we can devote all our energies to applying their tips and following their suggestions. Yet, we are utterly incapable of

managing our time or organizing our life in a way that brings glory to God without God's help! Jesus put it quite bluntly when He said, "Without me, you can do nothing."

Back in December, Kristin quoted Charles Bridges' commentary on Proverbs 3: 6—"In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths." Let's allow Mr. Bridges to counsel us further on this verse. You will need to give this quote your full attention, but I am sure it will be to your great benefit:

"If in true poverty of spirit we go every morning to our Lord, as knowing not how to guide ourselves for this day; our eye constantly looking upward for direction, the light will come down. He shall direct thy paths.... Let the will be kept in a quiet, subdued, cheerful, readiness, to move, stay, retreat, turn to the right hand or to the left, at the Lord's bidding; always remembering that is best which is least our own doing, and that a pliable spirit ever secures the needful guidance.... No step well prayed over will bring ultimate regret."

In all our attempts to get more organized, let's not forget the humbling truth of which Dr. Bridges reminds us: "that is best which is least our own doing!" May this thought provoke a constant and genuine dependence on God.

Time Management for the Glory of God

by Carolyn Mahaney

As Christians we must keep a close watch on *why* we do what we do. This applies to how we manage our time and organize our world. Thus, ***the source of our motivation*** is the topic of today's post and the final point in this little series (if you're joining us for the first time this week, you can catch up on our discussion by reading parts one, two, and three).

Ah yes, our motives. How easy it is to assume that they are pure and noble. But let's stop and ask ourselves: Why do we attempt to make good use of our time and organize our homes, our offices, our lives? Well, let's be honest. All too often our motives are sinful and selfish. For example, can you relate to any of the following reasons for organizing your life?

- I feel good about myself when I've had a productive day, or my home or office is organized.
- I want others to be impressed by how efficient and "on top of things" I am.

- I am afraid people will think I'm lazy or incompetent if my house or office is messy, or if I don't plan my schedule well.
- I want my boss to notice my time-management and organizational skills so I can get ahead.
- I want other women to admire how I manage my home.
- I have a really hard time if my house or office isn't neat or if my schedule doesn't work out.

Here's the danger. We can be the most organized, efficient woman possible and yet fail to please and glorify God. We can have our homes, offices and lives in order, but for the wrong purpose and person - ourselves.

Once again Scripture comes to the rescue and addresses the appropriate motive for time management: "Whether you eat or drink (or organize or plan or manage your time), whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

So before we begin to plan and organize our lives, let's give attention to that which is most important - our motives. Let's by the grace of God plan and organize so as to more effectively serve God for the glory of God alone. This holy motive will have a transforming effect on our attitude and approach to time management and any task we tackle. And this way, even when our homes or our offices are a mess, our hearts will be pleasing to God.

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Women

by Carolyn Mahaney

Last week we talked about three biblical truths related to time management and organization--the source of our justification, the source of our ability, and the source of our motivation. Starting this week, we want to consider seven practices to become more diligent and efficient in managing our time and organizing our surroundings.

Now it was no accident that we discussed the biblical truths before the practices. That's because biblical truths must govern all of our time management and organizational practices. For example: I do not earn God's approval by getting up at 5:00 AM every morning to pursue the spiritual disciplines (a practice); I'm accepted by God only because of Christ's finished work on my behalf (a biblical truth). I can only organize my closet (a practice) in a manner that honors God by looking to Him for guidance and strength (a biblical truth).

See, practices alone, though a means of grace, do not transform us. My life is not ultimately changed by becoming more disciplined or getting more organized. Rather, I am changed as I grasp the truth of justification, depend on the Lord throughout the day, and do whatever I do for His glory. Hence, anytime we seek to implement a new practice, we must always revisit these biblical truths; otherwise, our practices will become new forms of legalism.

So with this in mind, I came up with a list of 7 Habits of the Highly Effective Woman (to borrow from the title of the bestselling book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*). We will consider these 7 habits over the next few days. This list has evolved out of my years of personal study on this topic. It certainly is not an exhaustive list; however, I hope it will be helpful.

7 Habits of the Highly Effective Woman:

1. She rises early
2. She maintains the spiritual disciplines
3. She focuses on relational priorities for every season
4. She sets up regular times for planning
5. She develops an effective to-do list system and calendar/planner system
6. She establishes an efficient routine for managing her home
7. She organizes her house systematically

Now please do not try to apply all of these at once! That wouldn't be wise. And remember that only God manages His time flawlessly. Only God is perfectly organized. Only God completes His to-do list. And we are not God. We are finite creatures and we might as well get comfortable with our finiteness.

Let me suggest you isolate one to three habits for application. David Powlison encourages us similarly: "Just as we don't change all at once, so we don't swallow all of truth in one gulp. We are simple people. You can't remember ten things at once. Invariably, if you could remember just ONE true thing...you'd be different."

So, in humility, let's take a single sip of truth. And that one sip, if truly digested, will affect many other areas as well.

The 5:00 Club

by Nicole Whitacre

The 5:00 club is a Mahaney-family club. Mom is the founder, chairman of the board, and the secretary. Without her, there is no club. This club has very few members (only six); no chapters to speak of. It is extremely unpopular from about 5-6 each morning and very popular every hour after that.

Actually, the 5:00 club is all about The First Habit of the Highly Effective Woman: ***She rises early***. In fact, Mom would say that this practice BY FAR has been the most helpful in seeking to fulfill the other six practices on the list. I wholeheartedly agree.

The 5:00 club began a few years ago while Mom was writing *Feminine Appeal*. The only way to meet her deadline was to get up at the insanely early hour of 4:00 a.m. Then, when we were writing *Girl Talk*, I reluctantly joined the 4:00 club. That was painful. When the books were finished, Mom realized that all that extra early-morning time could be put to good use for her family. And so the 5:00 club was born.

Every morning, Mom wakes up at about 4:30 a.m. She makes her coffee and then she makes phone calls—to the Bradshaw, Chesemore, and Whitacre homes. We all answer in our groggy voices—“thanks, Mom” and then roll out of bed sometime between 5:00 and 5:30.

I have to say for the record, that after Mom, Janelle is the most consistent member of the 5:00 club. This should give women around the world hope for rising early, because until this past year, Janelle would have been the champion sleeper of our family. If Janelle can do it—anyone can.

So why should you join the 5:00 club? For starters, getting up early ensures you get a quiet time each day. If you have children, you know that “quiet time” after they are awake is something of a misnomer. If you work a job or go to school, being on time is usually non-negotiable. Waking up late means your quiet time is probably the first to go.

Referring to Bible reading and prayer, John Piper says: “I earnestly recommend that it be in the early morning, unless there are some extenuating circumstances. Entering the day without a serious meeting with God, over his Word and in prayer, is like entering the battle without tending to your weapons. The human heart does not replenish itself with sleep. The body does, but not the heart. We replenish our hearts not with sleep, but with the Word of God and prayer.”

A second reason for getting up early is that you are prepared to serve your family's needs. Rather than be awakened by husband or children and expected to meet needs before you are fully conscious, you are ready to serve your family when they arise.

Now that you have two good reasons for rising early, I want to stress that this will look different for everyone! The point is not that really godly women get up at 5:00 a.m.! Nowhere in the Bible will you find such a principle. The point is that there are great benefits to rising early—both for your spiritual life and the good of your family. And there are Scriptures that encourage this practice (Psalm 5:3, Prov. 31:15, Mark 1:35). But “early” will look different for every woman reading this post!

Also, this practice may not be realistic for moms with young children who still get up at night. You are already a part of the midnight club and the 3:00a.m. club, aren't you? No mother of an infant should be condemned by this post. This is a time management principle to consider in the future.

At this point you might be saying, this sounds like a great idea, but how do you do it? *I'm just not a morning person and I'm not sure I can get up early!* Here's Mom's strategy, and her sleep-loving children can testify that it works:

- Set my alarm for the same time everyday.
- Get up. Turn off alarm, which is strategically placed on the other side of the room. (I've learned this is my most critical moment in getting up early. It is crucial that I never, never, never, hit the snooze button or lie back down to catch a few more winks.)
- Head straight to bathroom and then proceed directly to the coffee pot.
- Be prepared to feel absolutely miserable for about 10 to 15 minutes. (But the feeling of misery turns into pure gladness as I soon experience the delight of having that alone time and as I reap the benefits all day long. It is totally worth feeling miserable for about 15 minutes.)
- Your body responds to a regular wake up time. In other words, it gets easier.

So, do you want to join our crazy club? Try it for a week, and if it doesn't work for you, well, at least there wasn't a membership fee.

Q & A—The 5:00 Club

by Nicole Whitacre

We have received an absolute deluge of questions about the 5:00 club. So we have postponed this week's planned Q&A (quiet time materials for middle school kids) in order to provide answers to some of your questions. You know, it's looking like we might actually need some club bylaws after all.

The most common question was, "What time do you go to bed at night?"

Well, the 5:00 club rules are very broad, allowing even slackers like me to be a member. Mom is our standard bearer. She gets up at 4:30 a.m. each and every morning, almost without fail. So she tries to go to bed between 9:30 and 10:00 each night. When that is not possible, she will extend her 20-minute power nap during the day, or try to go to bed early the following night (8:00 or 8:30). But by getting up at the same time each day, she has trained her body to that rhythm.

Janelle's strategy is to wake up at 5:00 a.m. five days a week and then sleep in on Sunday and Monday (Mikey's day off). Kristin and I bring up the rear with fits and starts. We'll get up early for several days in a row, but when a meeting keeps us up until midnight, we don't bother trying. We just call it a wash and try again in a day or two. I'd recommend Janelle's approach for beginners. Mom's strategy is for advanced members only. However, a half-hour nap during the day is recommended for all 5:00 club members.

Another frequently expressed opinion was: "I'm not sure about giving up my free time after the kids go to bed."

Understandable. And it's important to state here, again, that the 5:00 club is founded on principle and not practice. The question isn't, "How early do you get up in the morning?" but rather, "Does your daily schedule reflect your priorities: specifically, seeking God at the outset of the day, romancing your husband, and serving your family?" The purpose of getting up early is to make the most important priorities most important. You may not have to get up at 5:00 a.m. to do that (I can see it now: 6:30 clubs popping up everywhere!). But I would encourage you to consider whether or not your schedule is truly serving your priorities.

Personally, I have noticed that my time early in the morning is often more profitably spent than my time late at night. If I get up early, I'm not tempted to stay up late, wasting time in the evening. I want to go to bed! And that extra hour in the morning is usually spent more productively than

it would have been the night before. Now this isn't true for everyone. My dad has a friend who does his best work between 11:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m.! The important point is that our schedule reflects biblical priorities.

Finally, a wife communicated a dilemma: Her husband's schedule allows him to sleep in late, while she has to be at work early each morning. Staying up late with him means she misses out on significant time with the Lord.

This is a tricky one, as we always want to encourage wives to orient their lives to their husbands. And yet, this woman's longing to spend more time seeking God is right and commendable. Now, this woman didn't indicate whether or not her husband was a Christian. If he is not a believer (and therefore would not appreciate her desire to make QT a priority), she may need to schedule another time in the day to read her Bible, or consider getting up a little earlier (30 minutes, let's say) and taking a nap over her lunch break. If her husband is a Christian, I would encourage her to have a conversation with him about how she can both serve and spend time with him, and still make her devotions a priority in the morning.

Planting a Seed

by Janelle Bradshaw

Hey everyone, I'm liking this "highly effective" thing. It's how I like to think about myself: "highly effective." But when I dare to look at the "seven habits" (check out Monday's post) I change my mind. Don't get me wrong, I'm highly effective at some things...eating, sleeping, sitting, and how about playing? Wait...I think I hear my mom coming...just a second...oh, sorry everyone, I'm supposed to be writing a serious post here. We are gonna have to save the rest of my highly effective activities for another time.

Okay, serious start...It's time for "highly effective habit" #2—***She maintains the practice of the spiritual disciplines.*** Two years ago, I had the huge privilege of leading a discipleship group full of godly women in which we took nine months to study biblical womanhood in a more in-depth way. We read many books and articles and listened to lots of messages. We had discussions and even took a personal retreat. We also kept track of our personal practice of the spiritual disciplines. We wrote down how long we spent with the Lord each day, and at each meeting we went around the group and read these times aloud.

At the end of the year, I had everyone fill out an evaluation form—to find out what had been most helpful and what could be improved upon. What

was the answer to the “most helpful” question on almost every form? I wouldn’t have guessed, but it was our little practice of keeping track of our times with the Lord.

You see, the spiritual disciplines were reaping big fruit in the lives of these women, some of whom had never had a consistent practice of seeking the Lord. But after doing so for nine months, they were different. The gospel had become more amazing to them. Their desire to fight sin had grown. They had experienced God’s amazing promise: that He will draw near to us when we draw near to Him (James 4:8).

The practice of the spiritual disciplines is a little like planting a seed. (Please ignore the fact that anything I have ever planted has died, and try to stick with me here.) You plant a tiny seed in the dirt and you wait...water...wait... water. (I know that there is a little more to it than that, but you get the picture). It takes time. The plant only grows after consistent, faithful tending to the seed.

I met with the Lord this morning. I’m looking pretty much the same as I did yesterday (enjoying a huge glazed donut—the baby asked for it). Mike hasn’t told me that I look more holy than the day before. But as I read the Word and prayed this morning, I was watering. Lord willing, I will wake up tomorrow morning and do the same thing. Morning after morning of watering and waiting, and I will eventually see a little green thing sticking up out of the dirt. Growth! More watering, more waiting—more growth!

Is seeking the face of God a consistent practice in your life? If not, then may I encourage you to carefully consider how to begin. Start small. Set reasonable goals. None of this, “tomorrow morning is the day that I start waking up at 2 a.m. and spend 3 hours in prayer and Bible study.” But rather, *what does faithfulness look like for you right now? What time do you need to wake up to make it happen? How long do you need to spend?* Get specific. Get radical. Consider, like my discipleship group, asking someone to hold you accountable. Open up this area of your life to another and receive the grace of God that accompanies humility. You will soon reap a precious harvest—growth in godliness.

Carefully Considering Our Relationships

by Carolyn Mahaney

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”
Ephesians 5:15-16

This verse could well be the theme verse for our series: “7 Habits of the Highly Effective Woman.” It’s not a verse, however, that we might initially connect with Habit #3: ***“She focuses on right relational priorities for every season.”***

Relationships. A highly important topic to us as women, is it not? We are, by nature, relational creatures. We thrive on interaction with others and wither apart from it. Our world is often centered on our family and friends. The people in our lives usually consume a majority of our time and thoughts.

Yet, we are often more passive and receptive than we are intentional and purposeful in our relationships. We may allow people to drift in and out of our lives. We don’t usually pause to consider our motives for developing a certain friendship or neglecting another. Emotions and feelings sometimes play far too significant a role in why and how we go about relationships.

Scripture would call us to “look carefully then how you walk” and whom we walk with! We must prayerfully consider our relational priorities in the light of God’s priorities. Do our relationships—the people we choose to interact with, the time we spend, the content of our interactions—bring glory to God?

Over the years, I have used a simple exercise to help me evaluate my own relationships. Approximately twice a year I set aside time for planning and evaluation (we’ll talk more about this when we hit habit #4). Among many other topics, I consider my relationships.

It’s pretty straightforward really. I make a list of all the people in my life at present. Beginning with my husband, I list all the members of my family. After family, I write out the names of the people in my small group at church, followed by other friendships, both local and out of town. Finally, I consider and list those people who I am seeking to reach out to for the purpose of evangelism.

When I’ve finished my relational catalog, I begin by thanking God for the many people who are such a blessing in my life. I don’t deserve family and friends like this! But thanking God for the blessing of relationships is only

the first step. Check back tomorrow, because this little exercise has only just begun!

Carefully Considering Our Relationships

Pt. 2

by Carolyn Mahaney

OK, have you got your “Relationship List” in hand and are you ready to proceed with our little exercise?

After we’ve thanked God for the blessing of family and friends we are ready to evaluate our relationships in light of Scripture.

First of all, let’s consider the following two questions:

- Is there anyone not on this list who *should* be?

For example, if we’re not cultivating evangelistic relationships (Col. 4:5-6), or seeking to encourage younger women (Titus 2:3), or reaching out to new people (Heb. 13:2), then God would have us make such relationships a priority.

and,

- Is there anyone on this list who should *not* be?

If, for instance, someone is an ungodly influence, we need to graciously sever that friendship (1 Cor. 15:33). Or if there are an excessive number of friends on our list (Prov. 18:24), then maybe we need to consider focusing our attention on fewer godly relationships.

Priority relationships shouldn’t primarily be based on whom we “click with” or enjoy hanging out with the most, or even those who “need” us the most. Rather, our relationships should spring primarily from a desire to grow in godliness, encourage godliness in others, and share the gospel with the lost.

So, after we have the priority people on our list, let’s evaluate these relationships a little more closely by considering two more questions:

- Does our involvement and investment with each person reflect the priority this relationship should be at present?

For wives and mothers: does our investment of time reflect that our husband and children are our greatest priority? (Prov 31:10-31, Titus 2:3-5)

Does our relational network indicate that we place the highest value on friendships in the church? (Gal 6:10)

Do our relational priorities reveal a lifestyle of evangelism? (Col. 4:5-6)

- What specific, practical changes do we need to make in our relationships so that we are involved with and investing in the right people for the right amount of time?

Finally, let me encourage you to show this list to your husband (where applicable) or another godly woman. Let's not assume we can figure this out on our own! And if you are a mother of a teenage girl, carve out some time to take her through this exercise.

Evaluating my relationships on a regular basis, in accordance with God's Word, has never failed to yield insight. I usually become aware of specific changes that reap God-glorifying results as I put them in place.

I pray God will bless you as you seek to bring honor to Him—not only in the way that you walk, but also with whom you walk!

Bye Bye Tears

by Janelle Bradshaw

My husband recently found me on the living room couch in a puddle of tears. Granted, pregnancy had me crying over spilled soup recently, but these tears revealed a little more. As I talked to Mike, it became more and more clear that my tears were over consequences I had experienced because of my neglect of Habit #4, ***“she sets up regular time for planning.”*** I had missed an event that I had really wanted to attend, simply because I neglected to keep up on my calendar. Oh, this wasn't the first time that I had experienced the result of ineffective planning.

You see, I have never considered myself “a planner.” I prefer to let life come at me. I would like to think of myself as “laid back” and “relaxed;” but I have come to see things differently. Through the help of others, I have seen that this “laid back” lifestyle was an excuse for my selfishness. I

wanted to be free to do what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it. This selfishness was bearing bad fruit in my life. I was not only missing events that I wanted to attend, but others were suffering from my unfaithfulness to follow through on specific responsibilities.

Yes, drastic action was needed. Habit #4 to the rescue. I already had a set plan in place for yearly scheduling (more on that tomorrow), but that obviously wasn't enough. My mom encouraged me to implement weekly and daily scheduling.

So Sunday afternoons now find me sitting down (somewhere really comfy with lots of pillows) with my computer and my list of overall priorities and responsibilities. These will look different for everyone, but mine start with the big ones—my marriage, church, relationships, home, work, etc. I take these large priorities and break them down into my daily “to-dos”. How can I care for Mike this week? Is there anyone that I can bless with a phone call or encouragement note? Which nights do I need to cook? When will I do the laundry? Which days am I putting in my hours for work? Have I left enough time for naps? You get the picture. I plug each of these responsibilities into a specific day. This becomes my weekly “road map” and the list that I refer to each morning.

You see, once I've done my yearly planning and my weekly planning, then my daily planning is a breeze. This wonderful quote, passed on to me by my wonderful mother, offers some sound advice:

“Follow the 15:4 rule: Spending fifteen minutes thinking about what you are going to do before you start will save four hours of wasted time later on. Any individual who has thought through her workday, set priorities, and organized the day's tasks is likely to accomplish far more than someone who moves randomly through the day”
(Stephanie Winston).

Simple, huh?

This simple, but “highly effective” practice has made a huge difference in my life. My priorities and responsibilities are receiving regular attention and evaluation. And the living room couch has not seen as many tears of late.

To Do a To-Do List

by Nicole Whitacre

This morning, after my quiet time, I made a list. A list of all the things I have to do today. *Take the bath mat that Jack stained to the cleaners. Talk to my husband about the finances. Call a friend who isn't feeling well. Grade papers for my writing class. Run errands. Write this post. Oh, and call another friend, and return that toaster, and ask Steve about...*

I, of course, am trying to follow Habit #5 of the Highly Effective Woman, which is: ***she develops an effective to-do list system and calendar/planning system.*** I've got this habit half-way down. I have accumulated many credit-hours of to-do list and planning experience.

But it's the "effective" part I have trouble with. My problem is that I tend to over-plan and way over-list. (Who else puts "File Nails" as an item on their to-do list? Write me. We need to be friends). My husband cringes when he asks what I'm doing today and I excitedly reply, "I am going to organize my life." Those seven words always spell trouble. That usually means he'll come home to find me in a pile of papers, sighing a lot.

However, I am blessed with my very own organizational advisor. Mom's got both the list and the effective parts down. So enough about me, and my ineffective system; here are five simple steps to her highly effective to-do list and calendar system.

- 1. Create a Master To-Do List**--First off, Mom keeps one running list of everything she needs to do. One author calls this a "mind-dump" on paper. This is her master to-do list. Each week she uses this list to do her weekly planning. She assigns various tasks from the master to-do list to the appropriate day of the week.

- 2. Create a Daily To-Do List**--After her quiet time each day, Mom spends 15 minutes making a daily to-do list. Although Mom does her list in Microsoft Word, you can do it just as easily on paper. At the top she writes a verse or quote from her quiet time that she wants to meditate on that day. She already has several to-do list items assigned during her weekly planning, and she adds more as necessary. When an item on her master to-do list is a big project, her daily to-do list may include several tasks to move that project forward a little at a time.

- 3. Create a Daily Schedule**--Mom takes her daily to-do list and allocates time for each task. She says it's helpful to consider energy levels and to schedule the tasks that require the most thinking (e.g.

balancing the check book, writing a letter) earlier in the day and save the brainless tasks (e.g. folding laundry) for the end of the day. Also, do your least-favorite tasks first and save the fun ones for last. Both the daily to-do list and the daily schedule are made with an eye on previously scheduled calendar items (e.g. homeschool Chad, dr.'s appt., church event, etc.).

4. Use Your Daily To-Do List/Schedule--Mom prints her daily to-do list/schedule and carries it around in her pocket. That way she has a verse, her to-do list, and the day's schedule with her at all times. She is also more likely to fill up otherwise vacant slots of time accomplishing something on her list.

5. Do It Again Tomorrow--Whatever tasks she doesn't complete get moved over to the next day and the process is repeated. For all you visual learners, here is a sample to-do list/schedule from Mom. In order to effectively manage your to-do lists, calendar items, and goals, etc. you'll need your very own "keep it all together" tool. Mom has a notebook (which includes a calendar) and she does her to-do lists on the computer and prints them out. By contrast, I keep all my information and lists on my laptop. You will need to discover the calendar/planning system—whether digital or paper—that is right for you.

Finally, there is one vital truth to remember about to-do lists. It's something my dad tells us often: *Only God gets His to-do list done*. Only God accomplishes everything He needs to do, in exactly the way He intends, in precisely the right amount of time. Only God! This truth helps me see the arrogant absurdity of expecting to complete my own to-do list. It frees me to humbly accept my limitations, and simply seek to honor God by being a faithful steward of my time.

Effective Homemaking with Kids?

by Kristin Chesemore

This is my first appearance in this "highly effective woman" series, by my request. With three little ones, "highly effective" means catching Owen before he smears lipstick all over my duvet. When it comes to Habit #6 though, several of my mom's suggestions have made a big difference in this season of my life. Here are three tips for "***establishing an efficient routine for managing your home:***"

Food and Clothing First: Lately, my laundry has been spinning out of control. I don't think I will ever see the end of it. I have been trying the denial method. I shut the door firmly and choose not to think about it. But it's not getting any better. I'm still hoping one of my kind sisters will come and do it for me (Janelle, are you doing anything today?)

As a wife and mother of young children, it's easy to get overwhelmed. On top of that, I really enjoy a clean home. My temptation is to find my joy and peace in the order of my house. Laundry I can shut the door on, and no one sees in my fridge, but the messiness of my house I cannot shut out.

However, in busy seasons like this, Mom has encouraged me to focus my homemaking efforts first on these two basic needs: food and clothing. My house may be a mess, but if my husband and children have clean clothes to wear and food to eat, they will be happy and life will go on. So, I guess I'm going to have to open that door to the laundry room after all!

Minimal Cleaning: Before I had children I cleaned my house from top to bottom every week. I sought to keep this standard after I had Andrew. I would stick him in the entertainer each Friday as I cleaned. Well, now with three little ones, all that is out the window. My house is almost never cleaned all at once. For example this past Monday I thought I could mop the floors--just mop, nothing else. Well, by the end of the day, I was only half way done. I still haven't finished.

My standard, to say the least, is a little lower these days. Mom has encouraged me to adopt a "minimal cleaning" approach: develop a plan for maintaining general cleanliness in the home and save the thorough cleaning for another season. So Windex and Clorox Wipes have become my special little friends; my quick way of making my messy house look a little cleaner.

And when I stop and look at my husband and kiddos, I realize that caring for them should be my top priority. Next week my family won't remember how clean the floors were, but they will remember the time, care, and love I gave to them.

Ruthless Paperwork Habits: As you already know, we moved into a small townhouse earlier this year. The corner of my room became the "unpacked section of the house." If I set some bills or miscellaneous papers in the stack there was no telling when they would be found. Bills were disappearing, papers and receipts were getting lost. Thus I finally went off to Staples and purchased \$40 worth of files and labels. I still haven't

bought a filing cabinet to hold them, but I do have my paper work sorted into the proper files. Now, when bills come in, they have a place to go.

In her book, *Organized for Success*, Stephanie Winston suggests the TRAF method for organizing paperwork. She says, “Happily, I’ve discovered there are only four things you can do with a piece of paper—four decisions: Toss it, Refer it (i.e. pass it along or discuss it with someone else), Act on it personally, File it.”

So, by practicing ruthless paperwork habits, setting realistic goals for cleaning my home, and tending to food and laundry first, I am able to at least be somewhat effective at managing my home in this busy season. These three simple goals may not serve my idol of a perfectly clean home, but they serve my husband and children, and that, I believe, pleases the Lord.

Peace and Order in the Home

by Nicole Whitacre

You’ve patiently waited, and now it’s time for the final habit of the highly effective woman. Over the past few weeks, we’ve learned that this woman:

1. Rises early
2. Maintains the spiritual disciplines
3. Focuses on relational priorities
4. Sets up regular times for planning
5. Develops and effective to-do list and calendar/planning system
6. Establishes an efficient routine for managing her home

Last but not least, ***she organizes her house systematically.*** Why is this so important, you might ask? As a young, disorganized spontaneous girl, I was skeptical of my mom’s commitment to an organized home. I thought she needed to “loosen up” a bit. However, now that I manage a home of my own, I see the wisdom of this habit.

Mom would always quote Elisabeth Elliot, “God is a God of order and peace.” Therefore, having an organized home is one (albeit small) way we can reflect God’s character in our lives and surroundings. An organized home makes for a pleasant environment, and an uncluttered home makes for an uncluttered mind and heart.

I asked Mom and the girls: “What’s the most useful tip you’ve learned for organizing your home?”

Mom:

To organize my house, I *begin with a master list of projects*. This helps me put the projects in the order of priority: first, what would serve my husband, and second, what would help me serve my family more effectively. Otherwise, I gravitate toward organizing and cleaning those areas of my house that most bother me, but don't necessarily serve my family. The master list helps me to be purposeful and strategic in my organizing.

Once I choose my priority project, then I *come up with a strategy to tackle it in small increments*. Or, as the phrase goes, "eat an elephant one bite at a time." A huge project can be overwhelming at first (an elephant!), but by breaking it down into smaller, manageable segments (one bite at a time!) it's doable. This may mean spending 20-30 minutes a day organizing one area of my home--cleaning out one kitchen cupboard or one dresser drawer or one file folder. Tackling one part of a project while I'm on the phone, or waiting for Chad to finish a school subject is an efficient use of my time. Not to mention that it makes the overwhelming task of organizing my entire home just a bit more manageable.

In her book, *Life Management for Busy Women*, Elizabeth George writes:

"I'm working my way through my house by my own method. I call it the 'one foot' method. I clean out at least one drawer, one shelf, or one foot of space every day. And it's usually done during transitional time, while I'm doing something else, like warming something in the microwave, waiting for the coffee to brew, heating food on the stove, talking on the phone, etc."

Kristin:

The well-known phrase, "*A Place for Everything, and Everything in its Place*" is my motto for organizing my home. If an item ends up floating around my house, that usually means it belongs in the waste-basket. Having a designated place for everything in my home forces me to clear out piles of Crate & Barrel catalogs, McDonald's Happy Meal toys, and lonely socks that seem to magically congregate on my stairs. If they don't have a place, their place is in the trashcan.

Janelle:

I'm a big thrower away. I'm constantly throwing away, paring down. Every couple of months I will go through drawers and closets and toss anything I haven't used recently. My guiding principle: *if you haven't used*

it in three months, get rid of it; good chance you'll never use it again. But you have to watch out for that "I'll use it next year" syndrome. You never will. Throwing stuff away makes it easier for me to keep things clean and organized in my home. Rather than having a basement you haven't visited in three years, or taking two whole weeks to organize your home, tossing stuff (or giving it away!) keeps the home running smoothly.

Me:

The most helpful tip I've learned for organizing my home is to *invest in containers*. As a new wife, I often tried to organize my home by simply collecting items into neat piles. But it didn't take long for those piles to melt into other piles and I was right back where I started. Last January, I finally took the plunge and purchased containers of all shapes and sizes from Wal-Mart (much cheaper than the Container Store!). Now that everything has its own container, my house stays relatively organized, and when it gets a little messy, I can de-clutter it in a snap.

I'm sure it's painfully obvious that we're not organizational experts, just ordinary women fighting the war against clutter. Not that we've won! It constantly is and will always be a work in progress. But as we strive for an organized home, we hope in some small way to reflect to our family and guests the peace and order of our Lord.

Ending Where We Began

by Carolyn Mahaney

We have taken a number of days now to consider the "7 habits of the highly effective woman." It has been our prayer throughout that you would get hold of some new idea or practice that will truly help you as you endeavor to glorify God with your life. We hope that has happened!

However, there is a tendency in all of us to become proud when we are implementing a useful practice or to become discouraged when we are not. We are susceptible to legalism when considering practical topics like those we've been covering. There is also the danger of trying to pull off a habit in our own strength or even doing it for our own glory or self-satisfaction.

It is for that reason we would like to conclude this series where we began--reminding you of the biblical truths we must never forget: the source of our justification, the source of our motivation, and the source of our ability.

So would you do us a favor today and go back and read the following posts?

Time Management and Justification
Time Management and Dependence
Time Management for the Glory of God *

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