

Explore Your Passions

Are you looking to invest your experience and knowledge in new passions? Have you thought about cultivating new skills or interests? Are you interested in learning a new language, remodeling your house, coaching a sport or traveling to exotic locations? The goal of this article is to help you to start exploring and discovering your unique interests and passions.

Discover Your Interests

There are many opportunities to explore, but finding what suits you may be challenging initially. To help determine what you want to do, ask yourself:

- What, if anything, is missing in my life?
- Where have I always wanted to go?
- What have I always wanted to do?

This is the time to do the things you said you would do if only there were time. Personal development can come in many ways, and there are now more opportunities to learn and rediscover yourself than ever before. Expand your horizons. Here are just a few suggestions.

Continuing Education

Brush up on your Shakespeare. Required reading in high school or college always seemed like a chore simply because it was required. Reading the classics as an adult, however, can open your eyes to different cultures and different perspectives. J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* are just a few.

Take a class. Taking classes for personal enjoyment or to spend more time with a significant other are just two reasons to explore continuing education. You can learn new home improvement techniques, nurture your creative side, become computer savvy, learn an instrument, become a wine connoisseur or a gourmet cook or take up ballroom dancing – your options are endless. To find classes near you, start by contacting your local community college, school district, craft stores, parks and recreation department or museums.



Begin writing or journaling. According to the International Association for Journal Writing, journaling may help you to:

- Balance your emotions;
- Know and understand yourself better;
- Grapple with a life dilemma — illness, career change, stress;
- Find more meaning in your life;
- Improve your writing skills; and
- Boost your creativity.

If you don't know what to write about answer some of these questions:

- What made me happy or sad today?
- What did I learn about myself through my career?
- Did I discover something new?
- What do I want out of life?
- What am I grateful for?

If you cannot think of anything to write, take a picture from a magazine or a newspaper and begin writing whatever comes to mind.

Explore your creativity. Everyone has a creative side, but it's up to you to discover what your special talent is. To begin tapping yours, first identify what interests you and decide how to express it. Next, create an environment that is conducive to your specific interests. Set aside a quiet space to devote to your endeavors. Relax and launch your imagination.

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Be a Mentor. What skills do you want to share and teach? Many young people are without mentors and need experienced and caring individuals to give them support and be a positive role model. For more information or to find a local mentoring program, visit mentoring.org, the website of the National Mentoring Partnership, a national organization that trains and connects mentors with



mentoring opportunities.

The Joy of Athletics

Try new sports. Maybe you are looking for a different challenge in your physical routine or just wanting to learn a new skill. Remember, however, not all sports are alike and while you may be in shape for one sport, you may need to take some basic precautions when looking into something new:

- Make sure your body is ready for the new physical challenge. Consult your doctor to see if this is the right exercise for you; and
- You may also want to consult a fitness expert for ways to strengthen your muscles appropriately.

Join a workout group. Working out in a group is great for extra encouragement and meeting friends, but there are other athletic options other than the competitive team. Walking, race walking, hiking, swimming, cycling, and yoga are all excellent sports that allow you to work out at your

own pace but still have the companionship of a team. You can gather information about clubs and groups at your local community centers, fitness center or YMCA.

Be a coach. To see athletics from a new perspective, try coaching your favorite sport. Contact your local community center, YMCA, sports league or school district to research coaching opportunities.

(Re)Create Your Personal Space

Are you just ready to make some changes at home? With commitment and the right tools and knowledge, you can complete most projects from start to finish. Think about what improvements you have in mind and make them yourself. Research online or take home improvement classes in woodworking, carpentry, interior design or landscaping and begin planning.

Home improvement can encompass different areas:

- Create a special place in your home for any new hobbies you are developing like an art studio, a photography dark room, a sewing room or a reading room;
- Change the landscaping in your yard or build some raised beds to grow your own vegetables or flowers;
- Build a pond or a fountain;
- Remodel your house or buy new furniture, carpet or artwork; and
- Try a new environment. Consider a move outside the city for the calm of the country or downtown to be closer to the culture.

Explore Your World

Travel. You don't have to wait until retirement to take your dream vacation. You can gather information from your travel agent, or do all your planning online, from booking your flights and hotels to checking museum hours. If you are interested in more than a cruise or a tour, there are other vacation options that are ideal for the traveler hoping for a more active agenda. You can go hiking, take education-based tours or get in shape.

Volunteer. President John F. Kennedy's message, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" is still relevant today. There are many different ways to volunteer. Organizations are actively recruiting volunteers to participate in service activities. Volunteering is another way to explore your talents as well as find fulfillment outside of the office and home. Many community centers, museums, and local non-profit organizations are in need of support. To find a volunteer opportunity that suits your interests, contact your local volunteer resource center or United Way or search for opportunities online at sites such as:

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- **Volunteer Match:** volunteermatch.org;
- **Corporation for National and Community Service:** nationalservice.gov; and
- **Idealist:** idealist.org.

Conclusion

The suggestions presented here only touch on the opportunities and activities available to you to as you explore your personal passions. Use them as starting points for your own research, talk to your friends about their adventures and plans and get started exploring your own unique interested.

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How to Make Time for Family, Friends and Yourself in Your Busy Life

Developing an effective time-management strategy is key for taking control of your free time and investing in what matters most — your family, friends and personal growth. Here are some ways to ensure you get more 'quality time' to spend as you see fit.

First Step

Start with managing your time "on the clock". Look at how you manage time for your obligations – do you like what you see? If not, the following steps can get you started on a path to better balanced time budgeting:

- **Make a generic work schedule**
Making and maintaining a generic "work" schedule will give you an idea of how much time you dedicate to certain activities. Find which activities you think are taking too much (or too little) time out of your day, and plan accordingly.
- **Identify your priorities**
When prioritizing your tasks in your new schedule, give personal and social concerns equal consideration to professional ones. Is it more important that you get that portfolio out to the new client or to attend your

child's recital? Consider all these factors carefully as you prioritize.

- **Choose a course and stick to it**

The only time you should consider changing direction mid-task is when you know it is going to save you time; when you change your mind halfway through, you cut into time that you could be spending on other things.

Work Your Plan

Now that you have made a new schedule, it is time to put it to work. The following tips will help you make sure that you can keep your schedule free enough to accommodate a balanced lifestyle.

Delegate work

Don't be afraid to delegate work when you are overloaded and putting other important tasks in your personal life at jeopardy.

Start with the bad news

If you begin the next phase of the day with the most pressing or worrisome task you have in front of you, you will reduce deadline pressure and minimize the amount of time you spend stressing about the task.



Come in under deadlines

Deadlines pushed out too far have a tendency to run over and impose themselves on your personal time. Put immediate action items first and give yourself adequate time to meet deadlines. You will reduce stress and the chances that the project may encroach on your personal time.

Get out the day planner

Keep track of your appointments, commitments and events. Being on top of your schedule helps you plan ahead and reduce future stress.

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Build in flexibility

If work is taking a bite out of your family or personal time, a flexible schedule may be the answer you are looking for. Ask at your workplace's human resources department about permanent flex-time options or arranging for more flexible weekly work schedules.

Get creative with your time

Creative solutions may be just what the doctor ordered. If you are booked, try "doubling up" your tasks. Invite friends or family along while you shop, repair your home or car, pay your bills or do any other "mundane" task you normally do alone. Kids are particularly interested in spending time with you, even if just to be a part of the process or help out. Add a little flair – a stop for ice cream or a brief pause at a museum, zoo or park – and you can easily create a memory that will be far more important than the task you just completed.

Don't wait 'til you have time — make time

When time is money, there is no such thing as "free" time. Make a conscientious effort to invest your time in yourself and in the ones you love, after all, they are worth it!

Conclusion

There is always enough time in the day for the important things in life – you just have to find it. With some effective time-management, a little planning and a commitment to the important things in your life, you can squeeze it all into the same 24 hour day – no matter how busy you are.

Organizational Skills

Staying organized is essential to accomplishing our goals. When we streamline clutter and get rid of waste we can focus more of our resources on what we feel is most important in life. While organizational skills are necessary, different things work for different people. What does organization look like for you? You don't need a complicated, color-coded system to organize your life if something else works better. To identify what organizational strategy works for you, just ask yourself a few important questions. As you respond, thoughtfully consider where your organizational strengths and areas for improvement can be found.

Organizational Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Waste Removal** – Keep track of your activities during a typical week, and document how you spend your time. What activities tend to waste your time? How can you minimize or eliminate these from your schedule?
- **Long-term goals** – Have a clear vision and goals for the long term. Does the way you spend your time reflect these goals? What are the daily and weekly tasks that help you achieve your goals?
- **Optimal time** – Identify the time of day you are most productive. Are you a morning or night person? Knowing your peak performance time of day will help you achieve quality work on your most important tasks.
- **Important vs. urgent** – Determine what is important versus what is urgent. Often we spend the entire day focused on what's been regarded as urgent. When we cater to tasks like answering every email right away, we often don't accomplish much.
- **Top three** – Ask yourself every day, "What are the three most important tasks I need to complete today?" When you're able to focus on three items, it helps you not feel as overwhelmed. You're more likely to stay productive when you're not thinking about everything at once.

Tips to Stay Organized

Some people are naturally more organized than others. Even if you're not characteristically structured and orderly, there are ways to learn this behavior. Here are several strategies for clutter removal, proper planning and time management that can help you develop greater organizational skills:

Tackling Clutter

- **Start small** – Organizational overhauls can feel overwhelming. Start with small tasks that motivate

you. Perhaps you can de-clutter your desk or sort through some paperwork. Work your way up from there.

- **Weekly cleanup** – Papers and mail can easily take over your workspace. Have a weekly cleanup where you discard or recycle papers and other materials. File important papers and put things in their proper place. This will help you stay focused and avoid the need for major reorganization.
- **Put in place** – After you finish using an item, return it to its place. This will keep your workspace looking less cluttered, so you can focus better. You also won't be losing valuable time searching for misplaced items.

Plan of Success

- **To do list** – Breaking down large tasks into smaller steps helps you stay motivated by checking off each item. Keep a to-do list for every task.
- **Plan for the day** – You can avoid morning confusion by planning for your day the evening before. Consider picking out your clothes or packing your lunch. Gather the files or books you might need. This may help you fall asleep faster too, as your mind is not preoccupied with the morning rush of responsibilities. If you're a parent, this is also helpful to do for your children.
- **Stick to one** – We tend to praise multitasking in our culture, but this can actually prevent you from being organized. Focusing on one task at a time is best and produces a better result.

Time Management

- **Avoid interruptions** – Sometimes we have to stop and address concerns that interrupt our day. But other distractions, like emails or voicemails, can often wait a little longer. We might feel pressure to respond immediately, but this can take up valuable time. Limit the amount you check email or social media to two or three times per day.
- **Time limits** – Give yourself an ending time for tasks you don't enjoy. You'll stay more motivated when you know there is a time limit. If you can't do this, break up the task into smaller steps. Do activities you enjoy between the smaller tasks you don't.
- **Set limits** – Don't apologize for organizing your life according to priorities. You might receive some pushback at first when you say no to certain tasks, but you'll be more useful to yourself and others when you decide what's important.

Finally, you might want to try and associate organization with positive feelings. While implementing organizational

strategies, consider playing music that puts you in a good mood or having a picture of those you love or scenery you find peaceful on hand. You know you'll feel good when the task is complete, and there isn't any reason why you can't enjoy your progress on the road to success.

Sources:

- <http://people.rice.edu/uploadedFiles/People/TEAMS/Getting%20Organized%20at%20Work.pdf>

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