

Spend time purposefully

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"I have written more in the past few weeks than I have since I graduated college with my creative writing degree 11 years ago," my friend told me last week. "I'm up to 41 pages so far."

This friend commutes an hour each way, is a loving father and husband who prioritizes his daughter and his wife (who just started a new job), and is still getting settled into his relatively new home. How is he possibly finding the time to write page after page?

He's not finding it. He's purposefully deciding how to spend the limited amount of time he has. He set an intention to write more and he made deliberate choices so it would happen. He realized how much time he was spending on social media and watching TV, and he decided to use that time on something more meaningful. We all have the same amount of time in a day - 24 hours. This time can't really be managed. We can't find time. We can't make time. But we always have a choice about how we spend our time.

Here's a beautiful and unanticipated outcome: Purposefully spending time on something we're prioritizing helps us purposefully spend time throughout our days. The night before our conversation, when my friend had written several new pages in his book, he had also shopped for and cooked dinner, spent meaningful time with his daughter, and gone to the gym. What is he, Superman? No, but success breeds success. And time well spent leads to more time well spent. I've noticed this phenomenon in my own life. When I'm really on purpose about something, I become a lot more on purpose about everything else.

Of course, the opposite is also true. When I'm operating by default instead of on purpose, I seem to lose control of almost everything... my eating gets less healthy, my exercising gets less frequent, my social media use increases, my mood spirals downward. Life is not very fulfilling when you're operating on default mode.

Ready to spend time purposefully? Here are some of my best tips on how to do so:

Time yourself. Pay attention to how long tasks take so you can understand how much of your time is going to each one. How long are you on Facebook each day? How long are you spending in meaningful conversations with your family members? The results might surprise you.

Do one thing at a time. When I feel out of control, I feel better as soon as I slow down and just do one thing. Completely. And then the next thing. And then the next thing.

Say no. Deciding what to spend your time on means deciding what not to spend your time on.

Press the easy button. If you're spending more time on one project, you'll have less time to spend on something else. Sometimes that means doing something in a less-stellar way than you normally would. You can also delegate.

Identify the next action. You can take advantage of unexpected pockets of time by knowing what the next actions are on a project.

We all get 24 hours in a day. Spend your time purposefully.