

5 Important Things Every Busy Person Needs to Know about Taking Control

Taking control is something we all seek to do from time to time, especially when it feels as if events are spiralling downwards and we've lost the plot! However, control isn't always a good thing – closet 'control freaks' rarely broadcast their tendencies and sometimes when we try to take control we influence more of the very things we don't want. This article is designed to help you define what taking control means for you, and coaches you through the important things you need to consider to take control of your own life. Work through it on your own, or partner with a buddy to keep you on track. Don't feel you have to complete it all at once – take it at your own pace and really make sure you answer the relevant questions fully for you.

Good luck, and enjoy the journey!

Those 5 important things you need to know ...

Number 1 It's not really about time.

It's all too easy to become hung up about time:

- If only I had an extra hour per week, per day ...
- I never find time to ...
- My time is not my own ...

We all have exactly the same amount of time available to us, and we have a choice about how we use it.



Stephen Covey, in his book *First Things First*, talks about the importance of filling our jar with big rocks first, then fitting the smaller rocks and sand in around. If we put smaller rocks and sand in the jar first, there is no room left for the big rocks. The moral of this story is, if we concern ourselves with small, inconsequential things, we have no space left for the bigger, more important things.

Of course, this pre-supposes we know what the important things are, and that's why the second thing you need to know is:

Number 2 What does 'taking control' mean for you? (*Acknowledge what you really want for yourself*)

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is out of control in my life right now?
- What is causing this?
- What does *taking control* mean for me?
- How will I know I've done it – what evidence will there be?
- What do I need to start doing more of to regain control?
- What do I need to stop doing?

Exercise

Write a paragraph to express what your life will be like when you have taken control. Here's an example written by a coaching client of mine. Notice how she has written it in the present tense:

I have taken control of my life

My work is enjoyable and fulfilling. I have meaningful relationships and spend time with people who are important to me. My health is good and I keep physically fit. I have sufficient funds for a nice house and to buy things I need for me and my family. I am aware of where I make a contribution to the lives of others, and I act on that awareness. I am continually finding ways to grow and learn. I have fun and laughter in my life.

Read your paragraph regularly as an affirmation to keep you on track.

Number 3 Learn to let go of perfection.

Some women I know find it hard to leave the house when it's untidy, or the beds are unmade. Are you involved in far too many activities, because you believe they won't get done properly unless you do them? Sometimes control can get out of control! These examples of relatively small actions can characterise a bigger need for perfection.

The trouble with perfection is that it's so unattainable ... and in any case, whose definition of perfection should we work with? When we strive for perfection, we rarely 'switch off', because there is always something to do, and it puts unnecessary strain on us to make sure things are 'just so'. If this is an issue for you, go back and review the paragraph you wrote in number 2.

Exercise

The next time you feel a need to make it perfect, ask yourself:

- How does taking this action connect with what I truly want for myself?
- What would be the worst thing that could happen if I didn't do it?
- What would I really like to do, or how would I like to be, instead?
- What will it take for me to do that alternative thing?

Number 4 It's OK (even actively encouraged) to put yourself first!

You know how, when you're on an aeroplane and they do the safety briefing, they always advise you to fit your own oxygen mask before helping other people? This is because, if you're the sort of person who is always busy fitting other people's oxygen masks and not taking care of your own, you find yourself short of breath and unable to operate at your optimum capacity. If that sounds familiar, this one is for you ...

Exercise

Make a list of all the things you enjoy doing – the things that make you feel good and energise you. Curling up with a book, going for a run, making pancakes – anything at all, and include as many things as you like.

Now take your diary and plan one of each of these things into each day for the next week. Use the principles in number 1 to make sure you fit them into your day.

What is that like, taking time for yourself?

Hint: if it feels selfish, focusing on yourself like that, consider how selfish it is when you constantly present a tired and burned out self to those who rely on you. Do you really operate at your best when you're in that state?

Number 5 Focus on ways to find yourself interesting.

Many people caught up in busy work lives seem to get to the stage where it's all about work and family, and they lose themselves. In short, they stop finding themselves interesting. Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to develop interests and get your mojo back! Most people have something in their lives that they used to love doing, but have now stopped. Or something they have always wanted to do, but have never got round to.

Exercise

Work with a friend or colleague to help you uncover that activity or pastime that you've been denying yourself. Be honest with yourself – if there were no restrictions or reasons why not, what would you really like to do?

Now write down 3 small steps you can take to make this happen for yourself. Focus on these steps, and notice what happens when you take them.



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Helen partners with organisations to retain and promote female talent, and helps talented women in business to fast-track their progress, step up to more senior roles and increase significantly the contribution they make in the workplace.

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