

FAMILY

I'm a time management expert for busy parents. Here's the one thing I never do

In the coming year, consider a new way to organize all those tasks and responsibilities.



Time management coach Megan Sumrell is pictured here enjoying precious time with her family. Courtesy: Megan Sumrell.

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By Megan Sumrell

Task lists, shared calendars, planners and time management apps: The list is endless when it comes to trying to find the right system to manage your time when you are juggling family, work, kids' activities, chores and life.

As a time management and productivity expert, I am often asked what tools I use to stay on top of my calendar. But, today I want to share the one thing I absolutely never do.

I never operate from a daily task list.

Sure, I love the dopamine hit I get from checking something off a list as much as the next person. But, I also know that the endless cycle of daily task lists leads to four problems:

- 1 First, daily task lists keep you in what I call "just in time" mode – where you are getting things done just in the nick of time. When you start your day creating a list, you are asking yourself, "What needs to get done today?" Whether you realize it or not, you are only thinking about the next 12 to 16 hours. That short-term thinking keeps you in a perpetual state of completing tasks just in time, instead of working ahead. When you are stuck in "just in time" mode, it also prevents you from making progress on long-term projects – because as you create that list for the day, your mind will skip over tasks that are related to longer-term projects or goals, since you are focused on the time-sensitive and urgent feeling tasks.
- 2 Second, task lists lack efficiency. When you plan and operate one day at a time, you miss the opportunity to group tasks together throughout the week. In the simplest form, think about running errands. On Monday, you realize you need to pick up supplies for a school project. You head to the store. Then, Tuesday's task list includes picking up a birthday card. You go back out to the same store one day later, ultimately creating more work for you, exactly the opposite of what we want.
- 3 Next, working from a task list creates decision fatigue. As explained in the book "Your Brain at Work" by David Rock, our brains have a limited amount of energy each day. Rock says, "Your ability to make great decisions is a limited resource." Think of your brain like a car. Each morning you wake up with a full tank of gas. Every time you make a decision throughout the day, gas is used. This means that every time you look at your list and decide what to do next, you are draining more gas. Once the tank is empty, your brain simply can't make good decisions – it has no fuel left.
- 4 Finally, daily list making does not take into account the time you have available against the time needed to complete your tasks. Are you tired of starting each morning rewriting all of the tasks you didn't get done yesterday on your new list for today? It isn't because you didn't work hard enough yesterday. It is because the list you made yesterday was completely unrealistic. Imagine walking into a grocery store with a \$20 bill but holding a shopping list that has \$50 worth of groceries on it. It was never attainable in the first place.

So, if making daily task lists is not the right solution, then what is?

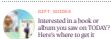
I recommended everyone start each week by creating a proactive, intentional weekly plan. When you spend your precious time planning for the whole week, you will reap the rewards with more time back in each day thanks to efficient task grouping, time budgeting and the ability to focus on and chip away at longer-term goals.



Time management expert Megan Sumrell is sharing a key tip for boosting productivity and quality family time in the year ahead. Courtesy: Megan Sumrell.

You're probably thinking you are too busy to sit down and create a plan for the week. I am here to tell you that when you get in the habit of weekly planning, it only takes 15 to 20 minutes each week.

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Repeat after me: a daily task list is not a plan. As we wrap up this year, it is the perfect time to think about a new way to organize your long list of tasks and responsibilities. And while I can't add more days to the calendar in 2023, I can help you free up more time each day – with the help of a little proactive weekly planning.

Megan Sumrell is a time management coach for overwhelmed women, and she's passionate about helping moms achieve harmony in their lives through all things time management, organization and productivity.

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