

## Control Your Calendar

*“If you don’t control your calendar, your calendar will control you.”*

*(Mark Batterson)*

*“Time is life. It is irreversible and irreplaceable. To waste your time is to waste your life, but to master your time is to master your life and make the most of it.”*

*(Alan Lakein)*

*“Until you value yourself, you will not value your time.*

*Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it.”*

*(M. Scott Peck)*

*“Show me your checkbook and your calendar, and I’ll tell you what you value.”*

Leaders who don’t have control of their calendars will constantly be spinning out in the dirt without making much progress. Life will seem frantic and harried, yet it will be difficult to pinpoint what they are actually getting done. I’m not the king of time management, but I do live and die by my calendar. Everything that is important in my life goes on my calendar.

**Here are six principles that help me ...**

### **1. Put priority items on your calendar first.**

Perhaps you’ve seen the illustration where the presenter tries to fill a jar with a combination of big rocks and little rocks. If the presenter fills the jar with the little rocks first, he is not able to fit very many big rocks in the jar. However, if he fills it with all the big rocks first, then he can add many of the little rocks around the big rocks. The analogy breaks down if you go very far with it, but the foundation is true. You must put priority things (e.g., time with your spouse and kids, vacation, strategic planning, and vision time) on the calendar first. Otherwise you’ll never find time for those priorities.

### **2. Stack your meetings.**

If it’s within your control, try to schedule all your meetings on the same day or two each week. I knew I wouldn’t get much productive work done on those days, but I was going to have some great conversations, help move the ball down the field on some projects, and keep my staff moving forward because of our connections. Stacking your meetings will keep you from getting bitter about meetings ruling your life, and it will leave you with a couple of days where your schedule is relatively open.

### **3. Schedule your rest.**

If you don’t plan for rest and renewal, it won’t happen. My calendar will always fill up if I don’t plan for some down time. I’m always amazed when I hear people say, “I’m going to try to take a couple of days off next week. I just have to see how the week goes.” What? Are you kidding? You can’t wait for the right time to unwind or take a vacation with your family. It will never happen. Get the dates on the calendar months in advance. Always be looking at your schedule for busy seasons ahead. Make sure you plan some time in the middle of those seasons to unwind and get centered.

#### **4. Manage your travel schedule.**

If you don't travel, skip over this one. But many leaders have to be on the road. A few years ago I noticed my travel schedule was getting out of hand. One year I was gone eighteen nights, the next year it was twenty-five, then thirty-two, then forty-seven. This was not a good trend. Because my kids were younger, and because my wife was not able to travel with me often, I was unwilling to see that trend continue. So I sat down with my wife and my boss, and we figured out that thirty nights away from home was a reasonable number for me during that season. Any more than that, and my priorities started to get out of whack. If it was much less than that, it was more difficult for me to get my job done. I don't think the number thirty is magical, but I do think it's important for anyone who travels regularly to find the right amount that balances family, business, and personal health.

#### **5. Go home before the work is done.**

This is difficult whether you are in business or the church world. (In ministry, we convince ourselves someone might go to hell if we go home too soon!) When you go home before the work is done, it means you are leaving something really good behind. But you can't wait until your to-do list is complete or until the phone stops ringing before you head home to your family. The work is never finished. Just go home! *(Note: If you are a slacker, then please ignore this point. You actually shouldn't leave until your to-do list is done.)*

#### **6. Leave room for people and leave room for God.**

It is easy to fill up your calendar and not leave room for what God might bring along your path. I had a friend who called these "God-a-dents" instead of accidents. If my calendar is booked solid, I don't have the flexibility when someone drops by my office or a crisis comes up that needs attention. I try to monitor this by blocking more time than is needed for appointments, leaving a buffer between appointments, and keeping my door open as often as possible. This is just as important for Christian business leaders. Part of your calling as a follower of Jesus is to love and care for people—and that begins with the people already in your life. Make room to ask your employees about their lives, their dreams, and their hurts.

*"The key to becoming a more efficient leader isn't checking off all the items on your to-do list each day. It's in forming the habit of prioritizing your time so that you are accomplishing your most important goals in an efficient manner."  
(John Maxwell)*

- 1. What can you do right now to make sure your priorities get put on your calendar for the next six months?**
- 2. Are you traveling too much? Consider sitting down with your spouse and boss and talking through some manageable parameters.**

**Stevens, Tim (2015-01-13). *Fairness Is Overrated: And 51 Other Leadership Principles to Revolutionize Your Workplace* (pp. 32-35). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.**