

ACTION PLAN

ADVICE FROM JEFF DAVIDSON,
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BREATHING SPACE

Defending Your Calendar

Suppose your friend Jim asks you to volunteer for something three months in advance. You open your appointment book and find that you aren't doing anything that day, so you agree to help. You mark it dutifully on your calendar, intending to honor your commitment.

Two months pass, and the date approaches. You notice you now have several responsibilities planned in and around the date with Jim.

A day before you're supposed to help Jim, your schedule is jam-packed. Suddenly, Jim's longstanding request is an intrusion. Yet when he asked, it seemed innocent enough. So here's law #1 of defending your calendar: An empty calendar is not such a bad thing. So don't be afraid to tell someone "It's too early for me to make a commitment to that." Closer to the date, you'll have a better sense of priorities.

You need to continually defend your calendar; if you don't, it will fill with "worthwhile" activities. I'm not saying that volunteering to help someone isn't worthwhile, but on the heels of five thousand other things, it may not be appropriate for you to take on another task.

Your life, your career, the year, month, workweek and day are all finite. So look at your calendar as your life, and defend it accordingly.

IDEA: Go through prior years' calendars and examine the appointments, activities and tasks you entered. You'll probably find that 40 to 50 percent of your activities were nonessential. Most could have been cut because they weren't in accordance with your priorities. So don't yield to the whim of the moment, and learn to say no. After all, it's your life.

Next month: A checklist for avoiding unnecessary commitments.

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PURPOSE: To provide authoritative, useful, easy-to-understand information that will help our readers reduce stress, be more energetic and balance the demands of home and work.

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