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To do or not to do: That is the question

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This is a guest article by Jeff Davidson.

Much of what makes your to-do list, and much of what takes up your time during the day, should not be done at all. If that sounds shocking to you, I have a simple test you can take to determine whether or not the observation is true. Get your work calendars from 10 years ago, five years ago, a year ago and a month ago, if you still have them, in whatever form they exist. Now carefully review the events scheduled, the appointments you had, the tasks you listed and any other items that merited inclusion.

With the objectivity that comes after years or months, assess what you had listed, as to how important a particular item proved to be for your long-term career development, income, knowledge, happiness and well-being. If you're like most people, you'll be struck by the fact that a quarter, a half or more of what made it to your work calendar provided no real benefit. In many cases, it would have been better not to devote any time or effort to the activity.

As a second review, go back through old checkbooks. Notice to whom you wrote checks, the amounts, and what the products and services were. Once again, you'll be struck by the reality that so much of what you paid for was highly elective, questionable in terms of the returns that you received, and on balance, unnecessary.

Now turn to the present array of projects and tasks you face. Some are assigned, so you have no leeway with them. Much of what you face, however, is optional. It's up to you to decide whether or not to pursue a given item. In cognizance of your previous work calendars, to-do lists, checkbooks and credit card bills, what can you safely eliminate to free up your time, save your money and preserve your energy for activities and pursuits that offer greater promise?

Jeff Davidson, "The Work-Life Balance Expert®," has written 59 mainstream books, is an authority on time management, and is an electrifying professional speaker. He is the author of Breathing Space and Simpler Living. He believes that career professionals today in all industries have a responsibility to achieve their own sense of work-life balance, and he supports that quest through his website www.BreathingSpace.com.