

Too busy

Some people thrive on a packed day, hustling from meeting to errand and then to the next meeting all the while multi-tasking with their cell phone and various other electronic devices. Fair enough, let them enjoy feeling in control of their self-created hecticness! But many people complain their life is too busy, they say they can't squeeze in one more thing and they look like they're about to have a heart attack most of the time. This type of person knows how to remedy this. As you may have noticed, most of the info in this book is stuff we have already learned and, for some of us, have forgotten. We could all use a reminder once in a while. Most people have a story about this from their own life; it helps to remember the solution if we connect it with a story.

There are many sources for good advice on how to successfully live our lives. My wise mother repeatedly told me, "You can't control other people; you can only control yourself" and my father taught me, "Righty tighty, lefty loosey" (I have properly closed and opened anything that turns since I was five). But to remind myself to evaluate the importance of things on my to-do list I turn to a story from my oceanography professor at Humboldt State University (HSU). I chose HSU not because I had heard anything about the professors or the quality of education, but because it was near the ocean in the redwood forest and it wasn't very expensive. It turned out that many of the professors, rather than being tempted by fat paychecks, chose to work there because it was a good school educationally, philosophically and environmentally. As a result, many of them weren't only smart, but also wise.

As I worked two jobs to put myself through university, I didn't have much time to spare chatting with professors. I approached them when necessary for a project or exam. My oceanography professor, on seeing my haste after discussing an upcoming exam, asked me to slow down to hear a story. He told me how he had made a list of ten things in his personal and professional life that had to be completed before summer's end. Ten for a whole summer might not seem like a lot, but these were pretty involved projects that would take considerable time and have lists of their own. Five years later he found that list behind a filing cabinet and only three of the things had been done. "Huh," he said, "the family was still alive, friendships were intact and I still had my job. Not so vital after all." His story reminds me that if I am to make my everyday living happen at a pace I can handle, I must separate the important from the unimportant; the need from the want.

We shouldn't allow our lists to get too long if we don't like and can't take the stress of it. My Italian grandmother taught me that doing things at a pace that suits us is the secret to a good life; very few can handle too fast a pace over a long period of time. For lists that have somehow gotten too long, we must separate the important from the unimportant (not everything is equally important even though it may feel that way). When I have trouble evaluating the importance of items on my to-do list I put the items in the light of my Irish grandmother's favorite philosophical question: In a hundred years is anyone going to give a shit about that? She could really put things in perspective.