

Manage Your Time Like It's All You've Got

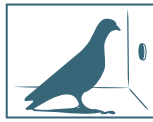
Behavioral Tools that **Get Stuff Done**

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Dedication

Janis

To Professor Shawn H. McCarthy, my successful stepdaughter. She gets everything done . . . and done well. She always has a detailed plan for meeting her personal and professional goals. She is the most organized time manager I know.

Allison

To Jose Martinez-Diaz, who always made quality time for people, and who always seemed to find or create fun in anything he did. He lived an amazing life, and I am so grateful he has influenced mine. May his song always be sung.

Shauna

To Jeff & Sherry Costello, informally known as Mom and Dad. Since day one, you believed in me more than I ever could. To Megan Lorne, one of the most successful time- and self-managers I have ever met, and I get to call you my best friend. Continuing to learn from you, both personally and professionally, has been a treasure I can never repay.

Foreword by Darnell Lattal

If you are like me, you may already know it's about time that you manage time differently. Opening this book, you may retain some faint hope that the words on these pages will change long-standing patterns of behavior that lead you mostly to feel you can never truly get the proper use of time under control. Perhaps you are an excellent time manager, reading all the books you can for that extra tip or two to becoming a Grand Master—very few wasted moments for you. Whatever prior experience brings you to this book and its clever title, you are about to take an insightful, funny, practical and inspiring journey that has the potential to change forever the way you look at time.

Three things make this book unique, a standout from other time management books:

- The authors share their engaging and honest perspectives, and the book is full of fun, personal examples and exercises so you can actually change your behavior.
- Instead of just wishing you the best of luck, the authors provide solid principles to build new patterns of behaving by applying the science that underlies behavior change. While the topic is said to be about time, don't be fooled. It is about living life well.
- This book helps you find purpose in managing time in order to live a values-driven life.

Getting to know the authors is not something that happens with every book you read. In this book you know who is writing each segment. You see the writers reflected in the pages they author, clearly identified by name, a unique aspect of the book.

Allison King is a woman who cares about her world. She is beautifully organized and cares about how she interacts with others, even while working to achieve personal goals along the way. Watching her, you know after a very short time that she wants to leave people whole after she has been in their lives. With a strong belief in the capability of everyone to change, she writes about the science of behavior with great skill. She makes it easy for you to master principles of self-change that can then apply to every aspect of your life. Allison is driven by accomplishing her goals and yet she does so in a way that leaves you believing she has all the time in the world—just for you. That is a gift. As you read this book, look for that in her turns of phrase as she writes about her journey through time, knowing with unblinking realism that this commodity we are seeking to master is not ours forever. She states, early on in the book, “Remind yourself every day that your time is finite. Do something that helps you really feel that fact.”

Shauna Costello is a direct, clear, and open person who invites you in to see her as she is. She is a feisty time manager. So much of what she writes about is her determination to surround herself and those who depend on

her with all the tools she can to keep moving forward while living life as she knows best for her. She emphasizes our uniqueness, that we are not the same and therefore how we manage the conditions that surround us will be different. She celebrates diversity. She says, early on, “Don’t do it like me; do it like you! . . . whatever life will throw at you.” There is no cookie-cutter approach from this wonderful human being. She goes at people and processes without judgment. She understands broadly how we get to where we are, and she respects our right to do it our way. At the same time, Shauna believes in shaping—a person-centered approach to lessening mistakes and getting to your end goals as soon as possible. You will find Shauna sharing her napping history and her late-night striving. Her balance and choice making, owned without apology for how to manage herself, is tempered by her desire not to burden others, such as working with an early riser on a project against her best work times late at night—a sweet acknowledgment of how our choices do affect others.

Janis Allen was the instigator of this book and her stories bring it to roaring life. Janis insists that you don’t dawdle. While telling you to get going she offers a wonderful hand to help you do just that. This book is fun because of the stories as well as the direction offered. Janis is a storyteller without comparison—each of her stories has a well-chosen purpose. For me, Janis’s central message is *value yourself*. I find that very difficult to do at times, particularly her advice on saying no without guilt. Consider her advice: “I protect my time like a mama bear protecting her cubs. That means full-time vigilance for intruders and a willingness to act.”

And so, to our authors: Personal and interesting narration, a science by which to change, and an anchor in assessing what we do against how we affect this world along the way. I am reminded of Allison’s sage advice as I enter each day to take care to consider this scarce resource called time. I thought of Shauna’s clarion call to be true to my values that guide whatever immediate and longer terms goals I set. What difference does it make if I accomplish great tasks involving good time management if I do not consider their effects? I hear Janis telling me don’t sit idle and lose opportunity to make a difference in this life. I do no justice to anyone by letting time run mindlessly away.

To the reader’s benefit, these three authors are clear-eyed thinkers grounded in the science of behavior, giving us all a chance to address the tips and strategies they offer against a plan for self-improvement. Look for the pink folder as you read this book. Consider the sage advice and how the owner of that folder’s story is a clear demonstration of managing time to reflect a life of accomplishment and caring, a life of purpose that gives joy. See if this book can help you increase the kind of impact on your world that you want to have, bringing you a feeling of satisfaction that today, and every day, you used time for good cause. What’s in your pink folder?

— Darnell Lattal, PhD

Acknowledgments

From Janis Allen:

Michael McCarthy edited and improved every section that I've contributed to this book. He never asks for credit, though his ideas, experience, and metaphors make all my writing better. And more memorable and fun.

From Allison King:

Thank you to my co-authors, Janis Allen and Shauna Costello, for their excellent time management advice, and for making the process of writing a book a fun and meaningful learning experience. Thank you to Darnell Lattal for always sharing her wisdom, and for encouraging and supporting projects that will develop me professionally.

From Shauna Costello:

Janis Allen and Dr. Allison King brought me onto this project after experiencing my love for time- and self-management firsthand. Working with you two has been a delight and I continue to learn from each of you every day. Writing a book with two co-authors may be daunting for some, but not for us. We did it!

Preface: This Book Is Not for the Faint of Heart



The title of this book, “*Manage Your Time Like It’s All You’ve Got*” was inspired by a YouTube lecture, “The Last Lecture” by Carnegie Mellon Professor Randy Pausch*. Professor Pausch had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. His talk was filled with useful time management techniques. His striking message centered around the premise, “Our time is finite.”

Your time is filled by behaviors—yours and other people’s. But is your time filled with productive behaviors? Or is it largely filled with other people’s priorities and your own procrastinations or less-than-productive habits?

To a great extent (much greater than you may think), you can control your time if you accept these two principles:

1. You can largely determine and limit the time you spend on specific tasks.
2. You can influence how much other people’s behaviors use (and perhaps waste) your time.

Applied Behavior Analysis demonstrates that

- we can control our own behaviors; with our behaviors,
- we can often influence the behaviors of others.

If you accept our challenge, “manage your time like it’s all you’ve got,” you may feel a sense of urgency to exert more control over how your time is spent. For the portion that seems to be out of control (or controlled by other people) assertive tough love is required.

“Faint of heart” refers to our reluctance to do any behavior that might appear rude to another person. For instance, use extinction (for example, removing our attention—which is our time—from talk that’s not productive); talk such as the following:

- whining
- blaming
- talk that delays action
- repeating the same stories or excuses
- off-task information

Change the subject to a more productive topic (use an antecedent to prompt and reinforce an alternative behavior) without listening as long as the other person keeps talking. This can be difficult because it requires interrupting the talker, which we've all been taught not to do.

These two actions, 1 and 2 above, are valuable time management behaviors that we can control, because they are *our* behaviors. We cannot control others' behaviors, but our actions can influence them.

A humorous example of these behaviors is found in the 2011-2020 British comedy (Amazon/Acorn) TV series "Doc Martin." The physician finds himself in Portwenn, Cornwall, a small, laid-back fishing village. Portwenn's residents live slow-moving lives, socialize above all else, serve tea, chat, and behave in the complete opposite mode of Doc Martin's efficient workstyle.

When patients shuffle into his office recounting details about their lives and personal problems, Doc Martin interrupts with, "Why are you here?" or "What are your symptoms?" Though startled by this abrupt change of subject (and dramatically contrasting with the former village doctor), they quickly answer his pointed question, describing where it hurts. In other words, they hardly notice that he's "rudely" interrupting and put their full focus on answering his questions. After all, the doctor's attention and focus is still 100% on them; just on a different part of their lives.

In a few minutes, when they inevitably wander into irrelevant talk, he brings them back with, "How long have you felt this?" or "Are you still taking your medicine?"

When the doctor is finished and has given instructions, ordered a test, or written a prescription, he simply stands up, opens his office door, peers into the waiting room, and loudly announces, "Next!" The slightly bewildered patient, sometimes still sitting in the chair hoping to be offered a cup of tea, ambles out of his office.

Though this doctor's behavior is a shock to the system of the chatty townspeople, they eventually notice that he is helping more people feel better, saving more lives (concussions from falling on the rocky coast), detecting causes of diseases (something's in the water) and making the little town healthier. This doesn't mean they don't still try to get him off course, but Doc Martin is not "faint of heart" about getting his job done and ruthlessly

using his time to help more people.

Later in the series when the powers-that-be try to replace Doc Martin with a different doctor who has a better bedside manner, the citizens organize, sign a petition, and try to persuade the decision-makers to keep Doc Martin in Portwenn. Even as his replacement begins and Martin is still packing up his belongings, some residents sneak to his door and ask for his help.

Doc Martin provides an extreme but clear example of excellent time management. You may not choose behaviors this extreme. If listening is an important part of your job and the best way to serve your customers/clients, you can still discriminate between talk that is pertinent and useful for achieving their goals versus irrelevant information that doesn't contribute to the improvement process. No need to spend 10 minutes on world events or spouses who won't take out the garbage. Ask a question that redirects the conversation or behaviors to the task at hand . . . and listen! (That's reinforcement.)

This book references concepts from the field of behavior analysis. Because comprehensive teachings of these concepts are beyond the scope of this book, the authors have tried to describe them and their applications in a format that is easily digestible to readers not formally trained in behavior analysis. Readers with knowledge in this field may notice some terms used more "loosely" than when used with a technical audience (for example, the terms *reinforcer*, *reinforcement*, and *positive reinforcement* are used interchangeably when referring to something that strengthens, or is intended to strengthen, an individual's behavior).

We believe you will find practical tools in this book for using your own antecedents, behaviors, and consequences. If one of these tools seem to you like a drastic change, no need to commit to using it forever; just try it as a test. If it works for you, you have a new tool. When these tools work, you'll be minimizing time-wasting behaviors and maximizing behaviors that use your time like it's all you've got. It is.

*The transcript of the video, "The Last Lecture" can be found at <http://www.cs.virginia.edu/~robins/Randy/TMenglishTranscript.pdf>

The video link is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTugjssqOT0>

This book is full of stories and examples of how to apply the behavioral tools on which this time management book is based.

When we tell stories that involve each of us, your three authors write in the first person. So you'll know which author is "speaking," we preface these stories as shown:

Allison writes:

Shauna writes:

Janis writes:

To introduce ourselves to you, we offer these brief watchwords that follows as an example of our three styles you'll enjoy, we hope, throughout the book.



Allison King writes:

“Remind yourself every day that your time is finite. Do something that helps you really feel that fact. The value of time management and how to do it will become much clearer to you.”



Shauna Costello writes:

“Don’t do it like me; do it like you! Our time, energy, goals, and values are not the same. Find what works best for you and constantly be ready to tweak and update your process for whatever life will throw at you.”



Janis Allen writes:

“I protect my time like a mama bear protecting her cubs. That means full-time vigilance for intruders and a willingness to act.”

What’s your time management watchword?

(We’ll ask you again at the end of this book. Please be prepared to state it in the “first person.”) 😊

Introduction

Manage Your Time Like it's All You've Got: How to Get Started

“DRIVE THY BUSINESS OR IT WILL DRIVE THEE.”

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

In this book you'll find dozens of concrete tools you can use immediately to gain more control of your time, achieving more of what YOU want. Rather than feeling like you're reacting to others' priorities, you'll feel more in control.

Because the material here is behavior-based, you'll be able to observe changes and improvements right away as a result of changes in your own behaviors.

You'll be able to choose your behaviors according to the priorities you set for yourself. This means

- a. rejecting or avoiding behaviors which don't support those priorities, even though the pressure to use your time doing activities that don't support your goals may be strong (see the “hook” that follows). You can control the amount of time you give away to other people's requests or interruptions.
- b. scheduling time for behaviors which do support your priorities, and firmly sticking to your schedule.
- c. arranging positive reinforcement for yourself to strengthen and increase behaviors a and b.



Image courtesy of Michael McCarthy; used by permission

Deliver consequences appropriately to others' behaviors when they use your time well or waste your time—with emphasis on

- setting specific expectations for actions, responsibilities, and deadlines; and
- providing reinforcement for all behaviors you want to strengthen.

We encourage you to use the scientific method as you make changes: perform a test, also known as an intervention, in your own behavior. Measure the frequency of the resulting behaviors as defined by productive use of your time. YOU get to define *productive*, based on your own priorities.



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Post-intervention:

Are you spending more time on your priorities?

Is this helping you to perform better in serving your customers?

If your answers are yes to these questions, your test results show you that your intervention is working, and your new behavior is a candidate for permanent adoption!

If your answers are no, test a different behavior and measure the frequency of your productivity. Based on these experiments, we think you'll find some keepers for a more in-control life!



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Dedication	v
Foreword by Darnell Lattal	vi
Acknowledgments	viii
Introduction	xiii
Overview of Time Management Challenges and Solutions	xvii

SECTION 1: MANAGING OUR OWN BEHAVIORS

Your Values and Goals	3
Your Goals and the 80/20 Rule	9
Successfully Scheduling Your Day & Week	15
The Magic of Lists	23
The Joy of Deadlines	30
Just for Fun: Shake a Leg	34
Making Ready	35
Put Off Your Procrastinating!	39
Priority Matrix, the Premack Principle, and Reinforcement for Ourselves!	45
Streamline Your Home Workspace and Build New Habits	55
A Portrait of Work/Life Balance	71

Section 2: INFLUENCING OTHERS' BEHAVIORS

Overview: How Our Behaviors Influence the Behaviors of Others	81
Just Say No (or Gotta Go)	83
Lost & Found at Work and at Home	89
Help Others Adapt to Changes in Your Behavior	93
Working Supervisors: Train, Let Go, Coach, and Reinforce	101
Positive Reinforcement Makes Everything Work Better	108
Working from Home	115

CONTENTS

Section 3: COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR TIME MANAGEMENT

Asking for Help and Delegating	127
Edit Yourself	131
Reinforce Productive Talk and Behaviors (While Decreasing Non-Productive Talk and Behaviors)	137
Manage Your Meeting Time So It Doesn't Manage You	146
Legitimize Your Meetings	149
Agendize: Keep Your "Ize" on the Prize	153
Deputize Your Meeting Attendees	159
Optimize Your Meeting Time	162
Downsize Your Interruptions at Work and at Home	168
Right-Size Your In-Person & Phone Meetings	172
Analyze Behavior: Meeting Case Studies	175
Economize Your Email	177

Section 4: SUMMARY AND FINAL EXAM

Summary	185
Just for fun!	186
Final Exam	187

Section 5: HOW THE AUTHORS USED THESE TOOLS TO WRITE THIS BOOK

Efficient Email Communication	191
Meeting Agendas	193
Checklist for Quality Writing	194
Scorecards for Measurement, Self-Tracking, and Self-Managing	195
About the Authors	196
Reference List	197
Books, Articles and Audio	201
GLOSSARY	204
Index	206
Also by	212

Chapter One

Your Values and Goals

The Question

Allison writes:

I was recently watching a rerun of an old show. The main character was applying to colleges and was fretting over one of the essays she had to write. The instructions were to write an essay that answered the question, “What is the most important thing in your life?”

The show never revealed how she answered it. I was bummed; I wanted to know!

To satisfy my curiosity on this topic, I allowed myself to take a little trip down a rabbit hole. (“Rabbit Holes” are not always bad! More on that later.) I couldn’t help wonder how I would answer that question. And then a memory popped in my head.

I was in my childhood bedroom, 17 years old, sitting at my computer desk that faced the window. It must have been between 6 and 7 a.m. There was nothing very special about this morning, but it stands out to me because I had recognized that I had been feeling very happy lately. And I hadn’t felt happy for a long time. I remember thinking, “Why am I feeling happier lately? What’s different now than before?”

It didn’t take long for me to realize what it was.

I had recently taken the time to think about what was important to me, what I wanted for my life, and who I wanted to be. I realized that before this, I had never seriously thought about it. And during this exercise, it occurred to me that I had been going with the flow for so long, not thinking about whether my choices and actions were leading me to the future I envisioned for myself, or whether they were aligned with the person I wanted to be for myself and for the people I cared about.

I know; I was only 17. What did I know? But this exercise changed my life from that moment on. It prompted me to set goals that were meaningful to me. And these were simple things! I remember some goals were simply small challenges for myself to improve certain skills. For example, I signed up for a speech class (which

terrified me) and practiced public speaking more often. (I always wanted to get better at public speaking, but avoided it, which made me feel bad.)

I also set a goal that would help me be more aligned with who I wanted to be. I had been spending most of my time with friends and missing out on family events. I made a goal to plan more time with my siblings. I also made a goal to schedule more time for activities that I found fun (rather than always doing whatever friends were doing).

These goals gave me that feeling of “looking forward” to something. They gave me an opportunity to notice progress toward something I desired. They gave me a sense of excitement—a sense that I was on a journey. It may have been a small one, but it was meaningful to me. The goals also made me feel proud of myself more often, as I had something concrete to self-evaluate my actions against. I believe this was responsible for my increased happiness.

I realize now how I would answer the question, “What is most important to you?”

The most important thing to me is the very act of answering that question! The act of answering, “What is most important to you?” and doing so regularly is a catalyst to setting meaningful goals, having something to look forward to, and taking purposeful action toward it.

It turns out that the act of answering this question is helpful to many others, too. In fact, this is at the heart of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) coined by psychologist Steven Hayes. ACT is an effective, empirically based therapy that uses acceptance and mindfulness strategies, together with commitment and behavior-change strategies, to increase psychological flexibility (Association for Contextual Behavior Science, n.d.).

ACT is all about helping others live a rich and meaningful life through committed actions, which are guided by and motivated by values.

Values

Goals provide a sense of direction and give us things to “look forward” to. But people can set goals and still feel miserable working toward them. They might find themselves constantly abandoning their goals. Or even worse, they might finally achieve their goals but feel nothing . . . maybe a fleeting sense of accomplishment, but a missing sense of purpose.

In his book *The Happiness Trap*, Russ Harris defines *values* as “. . . our heart’s deepest desires: how we want to be, what we want to stand for, and how we want to relate to the world around us. Leading principles that can

Index

Symbols

5S 56, 62, 66, 68, 134, 204

80/20 rule 205

80/20 Rule 9, 11, 204

A

antecedent x, 23, 35, 36, 43, 44, 67, 68, 103, 119, 140, 141, 157, 166, 167, 205

Ayllon, Ted 169

B

Baseline 204

Behavior iii, ix, 4, 38, 43, 58, 70, 93, 95, 103, 107, 128, 175, 176, 196, 197, 198, 199, 201, 204, 212

Brande, Dorothea xix

C

calendar 8, 10, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 53, 56, 96

children 15, 72, 76, 115, 117, 118, 119, 120

Clow, Julie 18, 21, 197

coach 93, 101, 107, 120, 169

Cockerell, Lee 17, 87, 197, 201

Consequence 103, 176, 204

cost 89, 151, 204

D

Daniels, Aubrey C. 31, 38, 44, 60, 61, 81, 82, 99, 113, 137, 139, 142, 196, 197, 198, 201, 202

deadlines xiv, 29, 31, 32, 62, 118, 127, 185

Deputize 148, 153, 154, 159

E

email iv, 13, 15, 16, 17, 23, 36, 41, 46, 56, 62, 91, 133, 135, 175, 177, 178, 180, 181, 185, 199

Epstein, Robert 61, 70

Erasmus, Desiderius xviii

extinction ix, 93, 94, 99, 144

F

Feedback 30, 204, 212

G

Gawande, Atul 63, 64, 198, 202

H

Helprin, Mark 88, 198

Herrnstein 60, 198

home 9, 56, 62, 67, 74, 101, 108, 115, 116, 117, 119, 121, 131, 137, 138, 139

I

interruptions 92

intrinsic 37, 68

“I” statement 85, 88, 97, 138, 144, 204

J

Justice 149, 155, 156, 157

Justice, Russell 155

K

Kaizen 64, 66

Kondo 57, 198, 202

L

lists 5, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 44, 77, 91, 117, 181, 185

M

Marx 186

Marx, Groucho 186

McCarthy, Michael v, viii, xiii, xiv, xvii, 27, 32, 55, 62, 90, 105, 114, 133, 146, 150, 180, 196, 197, 199, 201, 203, 212

meetings xviii, 15, 17, 18, 19, 56, 130, 143, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 156, 160, 162, 163, 164, 168, 172, 175, 176, 185, 191, 192

Morganstern, Julie 199
muda 64, 66, 89

P

Pairing 204
Pareto Principle 11, 204
Parkinson's Law 154, 156, 199
Pauline 41, 101
Pausch ix, 13, 42, 102, 106, 149, 168, 169, 170, 172, 197, 199
Pausch, Randy ix
Penn 44
Penn, William 44
Plummer 199
Plummer, Matt 199
priorities ix, xiii, xiv, xvii, xix, 10, 12, 14, 17, 42, 46, 55, 60, 83, 89, 91, 92, 93, 95, 97, 102, 109, 117, 138, 170, 185
procrastination xviii, 29, 31, 39, 40, 76, 198
prompt x, 8, 23, 47, 52, 107, 143, 166, 167
punishment 31

Q

Quinn, Ellen 72, 73, 75, 117, 118, 199, 202

R

Ramsey 108, 144, 199, 202
Ramsey, Mildred 108

S

self-management viii, 70, 141, 172, 196
shaping vii, xix, 35, 38, 129, 185
Shawn v, 27, 28, 32, 62, 90, 91, 120, 121, 169
Shawn, McCarthy v
Skinner 61
Skinner, B.F. 61
Snyder iv, 61, 70, 197, 201, 202, 212
Snyder, Gail 70

values vi, vii, xii, 4, 5, 46, 47, 51, 52, 53, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 185

W

White 65, 72

White, E.B. 65

Witthuhn 67, 199

Witthuhn, Bri Flynn 67

Work/Life Balance 71

Z

Zahariades 200

Also by

Allison King, PhD, BCBA

From Boo-Hiss to Bravo: Behavior-Based Scorecards People Will Use and Like
(with Janis Allen)

Also by Janis Allen

From Boo-Hiss to Bravo: Behavior-Based Scorecards People Will Use and Like
(with Allison King, PhD, BCBA)

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