

Family Counseling Service: Creating Structure to Help Manage Your Life

By Larry Deavers

Many of us face the same obligations on a daily or weekly basis. Often, we handle these duties with a “fly by the seat of our pants” approach that keeps us feeling dominated by our obligations and leaves us feeling like we have little control over our lives. This is especially true with obligations we do not enjoy, put off until the last minute, or face with anxiety or a sense of dread.

One important way of getting a handle on all your activities is by creating structure in each day. By implementing routines to help manage your activities, you can make them more manageable, and accomplishing those tasks are more easily done on your terms. You are better able to take on your challenges at your own pace by taking the initiative to anticipate what’s coming next and plan for it, rather than procrastinate, ignore it, and feel victimized by it. Establishing structure empowers you to set the time, the circumstances, and the attitude to face unpleasant activities more confidently.

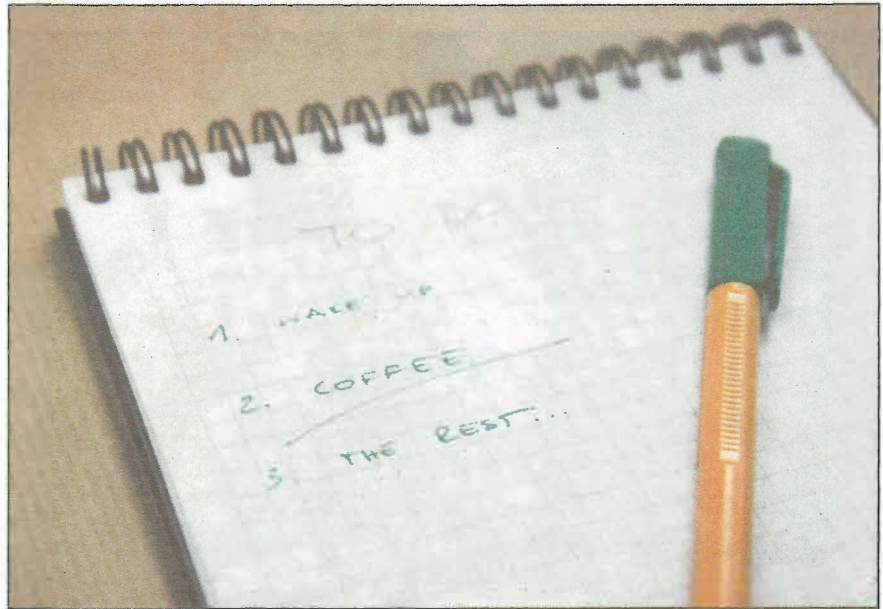
Once you have a structured time-frame built around the activities you want to accomplish, break those activities you most deplore into small, non-intimidating steps. Rather than contemplating the entire goal you need to accomplish, focus simply on the one single step you will do next, such as getting dressed, driving to the place you need to go, opening your computer to the document you need to work on, turning off the TV, etc.

One positive decision sets up the next positive decision. Taking one small step at a time can help you feel more in control of your decisions, and it minimizes the unnecessary ques-

tions we use to procrastinate. Sometimes, making a list of the tasks you need to accomplish and beginning with one of the easier tasks on your list helps build momentum. This forward momentum builds confidence as more is achieved. The sense of accomplishment becomes a growing snowball, if you stick to your routine and don’t allow your old behaviors and thoughts to creep back in and slow you down.

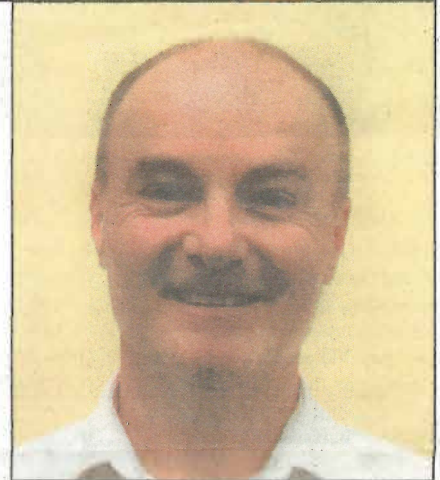
This approach also lessens the stress of tasks that must be done every day, as each item has its place and time and is not allowed to cast a cloud on the rest of your day. This reduces anxious or self-defeating thoughts before and during the activity (“Maybe I’ll just skip this today.” “I hate doing this.” “I just want to escape!”). Here are just a few of the activities around which you can create a routine:

- Preparing for sleep, going to sleep, and waking up at the same time every day
- Setting aside time each night to plan for tomorrow’s events
- Daily exercise, meditation, or inspirational reading



- Household chores and meal preparation
- Time for unwinding after work or before bed
- Wrapping up your day and planning for tomorrow before leaving work

Adding structure to your day increases your motivation, confidence, and sense of accomplishment. You will achieve more and feel more in control of your life!



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