

## April Newsletter - **Identifying Daily Tasks and Activities**

We all have them – tasks or activities that must be done every day for life to run smoothly. Definitions of daily tasks vary between people, but as a rule, life becomes more difficult when we don't realize (or let ourselves realize) that a daily task is really that important or we avoid it. Daily self-care needs (such as exercise, relaxation, laughter) are particularly important but easily neglected in the press of constant demands and distractions from the world around us.

So how do we identify daily tasks? Part of the definition of a daily task or activity might be that the work or consequences accumulate and become larger problems when not regularly done. We can evaluate these issues better by grouping possible daily tasks in three areas: housekeeping, business, and self-care (not in order of priority). One example of a probable daily task or activity of each type and some consequences of not doing them are:

### Housekeeping – Not washing dishes

- Lack of clean dishes make preparing and serving meals harder
- Bad smells and appearance increase the longer dishes are not washed
- Dishes become harder to clean “ “ “ “ “
- Embarrassment if the mess is seen “ “ “ “ “ “
- Pests are encouraged and health risks increase “ “ “ “

### Business – Not sorting mail

- Important notices may be missed or lost
- Unpaid bills may lead to late fees and damaged credit
- People who expected a response are hurt, upset, or give up on you
- Piles become harder to deal with as they become larger

### Self-care – Not doing exercise

- Your body loses tone, muscle mass, bone density, and balance skills, increasing the risk of sprains, strains, breaks, and falls
- Your body becomes less capable of handling sudden or special demands
- Health consequences multiply (risks for heart disease, obesity, diabetes and many more increase)
- Distress signals from your body to the brain are ignored, creating tension
- Healthy habits are undermined and resistance to building a healthy habit is increased
- Good posture, needed for optimal health and confidence, becomes harder to maintain

- Your brain generates fewer endorphins, increasing susceptibility to addiction, depression, and low self-esteem, to name a few

Another part of a daily task definition might simply be that we feel better when it is done and we make life better for people around us. These are important concerns. Our experience and quality of life is entirely based on our feelings.

Making your own list of consequences for not doing various tasks or activities will help you decide whether they need to be daily, weekly, monthly, or annually. Even better, listing the benefits, the reasons to WANT to do the task or activity will help to see it in a more constructive light.

The consequences of not doing need-to-be-daily activities become more numerous and difficult to deal with the longer they aren't done. The consequences of not doing other tasks, such as vacuuming or dusting, accumulate more slowly so they might only need to be done weekly (although they could be daily tasks for people with respiratory illness). Not doing weekly tasks has consequences also, but they may not be as numerous, obvious, or obnoxious.

The most important factor for deciding whether a task needs to be daily, weekly, monthly, or annual should be the impact of the consequences – some tasks that are not done within a given time create bigger problems than others. Example: not doing meditation or some form of daily relaxation leads to increasing mental distress and irritability, difficulty coping and maintaining perspective, and numerous health risks, but writing, needed for self-expression and demon management, might be less frequent depending upon how essential writing is for your mental health.

Being clear about the importance of a daily task aids staying on track. Skipping a daily task for a day or two may seem harmless, but really, great harm is done. Building constructive habits of any kind is hard – hundreds of distractions pull us away from caring for our homes, personal business, and ourselves. It takes at least 30 days (and often much more!) to build a dependable new constructive habit, but missing it just once or twice will often undermine or destroy it. Our demons (negative thoughts and emotions) are always waiting to take over and rip apart everything we build.

Below are some steps to identify your needed schedule for keeping up with tasks or activities in all areas:

\* Identify your **essential tasks and activities and their appropriate frequency**. **Keeping up is much easier than catching up**. Usually, daily cleaning tasks need to include washing dishes, sweeping, making the bed, putting dirty clothes in the hamper, neatening surfaces, cleaning the bathtub or shower, but there may be some on this list that are not applicable and you may have a whole world of potential other essentials.

\* Have a **consistent day of the week for doing regular tasks or activities**, such as laundry or shopping, to ensure keeping up and not falling behind.

\* Consider the consequences of not doing any daily task to make sticking with your chosen regimen easier. The more that you dislike the discomfort of those consequences, the less likely you will skip the task. **Write out your list of reasons for wanting to do the task or activity and the ways that doing the task will benefit you; re-read it whenever you want to skip any important task**.

\* Control your self-talk: if you allow yourself to think about how much you hate to do this task, you will only make yourself miserable while doing it and the task will still need to be done. Focusing on why you WANT to do the task makes the experience of doing it more pleasant and perhaps even opens you up to a world of learning. As a kid, I hated doing dishes and mightily resisted the chore to my parent's great distress, but as an adult, I came to see doing dishes as a way of expressing love for the people I was with. Now late in life, washing dishes relieves pain in my hands, helps me feel good about myself, and to feel comfortable having a visitor drop in at any time, and I look forward to doing them.

\* If you must skip a task, identify WHEN you will do it, and WHAT other activity you must give up to make time for the skipped task. If not doing what you planned is frequent or common, evaluate how you use your time: identify the time-wasters (Facebook, the Internet, casual chit-chat, most TV, reading every article in the newspaper, to name a few), and create a plan to shrink them.

\* Writing a realistic daily to-do list that includes all your various tasks, no matter how routine, will help ensure that you carry through your plans and accomplish what you want. If you find daily to-do lists difficult to manage, read my articles [The Joy of Using a Planner](#), [Making Self-Discipline Possible](#), [Priorities in Action](#), and [Developing Consistency](#). There are many other relevant articles on related topics on my website ([Articles Index](#)) but this list is getting overly long. To-do lists need to be realistic because including more than is possible is counter-productive: not completing your plan will make you depressed and mad at yourself for nothing.

Put tasks that are not really possible on an upcoming day rather than on today and feel better about yourself.

The most difficult aspect of identifying daily tasks is not lying to ourselves about what we really need to do. The human tendency to sugar-coat, wish away, avoid effort, and resist anything not on our favorite activity list is universal. Building daily task or activities into a dependable, consistent, automatic routine will be a source of peace of mind, better organization and control, and make your life work better.

I'd like to hear what I missed – what else should be on the task list below?

## Potential Essential Daily Task / Activity Needs

<u>Task / Activity</u>	<u>Frequency</u> <small>D=Daily, W=Weekly, M=Monthly, A=Annual</small>	<u>When</u> <small>Best day of week or day of month</small>
<b>Cleaning</b>		
Dishes		
Sweep / mop		
Neaten surfaces		
Make bed		
Laundry		
Change linens		
Grocery shopping		
Vacuum, dust		
Take out trash		
Scrub sink		
Scrub tub/shower		
Clean windows		
Weather-stripping		
Switch clothing		
Others:		
<b>Self-care</b>		
Exercise		
Meditation		
Relaxation		
Gratitude		
Planning		
Fun		
Massage		
Posture		
Socialize		
Self-expression (art, writing)		
Others:		

