

“It’s about doing more of the things that are important to you.”

The quality of your life directly relates to the quality of your mothering.

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In the busy-ness of life it’s a forgotten dream for many – the magical world of “Me Time”. While it’s almost become an annoying cliché to talk about “Me Time”, your own time to do what makes you happy and whole – be it to read a book, meet with friends, exercise, paint, sing or dream – is vital to your health and mental wellbeing. There are never enough hours in the day and it feels like everyone wants something from you – your spouse, your children, your friends and your employer. Even the dog gazes mournfully up at you as you rush in the door, juggling shopping bags and baby paraphernalia. You try and give your all to your children and job, to your household and husband but in doing so you neglect yourself. “I don’t have time!” becomes your mantra.

If “Me Time” is a distant memory because you “don’t have time”, take a look at the quality of the time that you are giving others. Are you irritable with your children when they clamber for attention?

Do you lash out at your husband, finding fault with what he does or doesn’t do? Are you spending longer hours at work while achieving less, feeling exhausted and unproductive at the end of the day? Are your close friends drifting away because you never see them? Making time for yourself can halt the spiral of imbalance that has consequences for the quality of your life, including your family, your relationships, your career and your health. “Me Time” is not a luxury, but a necessity.

But where do you find this elusive “Me Time”? It’s not so much about getting more done as about doing more of the things which are important to you. The first step is to learn to distinguish between what’s urgent, what’s important, what’s neither and to act accordingly.

If something is urgent it demands immediate attention. On the other hand, if something is important it has a significant impact on your goals and purpose. An important task is not necessarily urgent, so it doesn’t have to be done now. The upside is that it can, and should, be

scheduled. The downside of course is that it can be put off; drowned out by the “urgency” of daily life. The consequence of delaying what is important is that it eventually becomes urgent, thus adding to the constant urgency-addiction that many people fall victim to.

Stephen Covey gives us a wonderful tool in his Time Management Matrix. This is a useful tool, not just in the workplace but in all aspects of life. According to Stephen, everything we do falls into one of the following four quadrants.

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	<p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Crisis * Pressing issues * Deadlines * Meetings 	<p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Preparation * Planning * Prevention * Relationship building * Personal development
Not important	<p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Interruptions * Some emails * Many popular activities 	<p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Trivia * Some phone calls * Excessive TV/Games * Time wasters

Quadrant 1 Urgent & important

Things that are both urgent and important must be handled immediately. Urgent activities may include dealing with irate clients, meeting deadlines and rushing to the aid of a crying child who has hurt herself. Realistically, you can expect to spend a fair amount of time on these types of activities, as they are a part of life.

Quadrant 2 Important but not urgent

These are quality time activities you should be focusing on in order to increase

balance and decrease stress in your life. Important tasks include long-term planning, self development, taking care of your health, building relationships, empowering yourself and others, clarifying your values and enjoying recreational activities. However, many people neglect what is important until it becomes urgent. For example, if you neglect your health by not eating well, exercising or taking time out to relax, you could end up seriously ill. Regaining your health then becomes a priority which means everything else takes a back seat while you recuperate.

Quadrant 3

Urgent but not important

You may be spending a lot of unnecessary time dealing with distractions that appear to be urgent but that are not actually important, at least not to you. These may include some phone calls, emails and requests from others. You may be swayed by their apparent urgency but clarify the importance of each request and learn to say no. Alternatively, delay requests for assistance until a time convenient to you. Let your phone go to voicemail and resolve to check emails a few times a day, not as they come in.

Quadrant 4

Not urgent or important

It may surprise you how much time can be wasted on activities that are not urgent, important or even truly recreational. These time wasters include junk emails, gossiping with colleagues, playing solitaire, surfing the web aimlessly, frittering time away on social networking sites and becoming addicted to mindless TV shows. This is not to say you should never do these things but be aware of how much valuable time they consume and how easily they become habitual.

How would you rate your satisfaction with the “Me Time” and therefore the balance in your life right now, on a scale of 1-10? If you have a rating below 8/10, then try this simple exercise. List 10 things that would give you a rating of 10/10 if you could have

them in your life on a regular basis. These may be things like having 15 minutes a day to read a book, exercising during the week, making time for a neglected hobby, meeting a friend for coffee every second week or having a night out with your husband once a month.

Once you have your list, check that each activity is there because it’s important to you, not to someone else, and schedule time for each. You might feel silly at first but you need to make space in your calendar for “Me Time” activities – what gets scheduled gets done. This is not a to-do list. It is a framework upon which you are building balance and scheduling time for what’s important to you. Commit to it. Ask for help if you need it. Communicate what you are doing and why to the people involved.

Introducing small yet cherished activities will have a dramatic effect on the quality of your life and relationships. You will feel better, healthier, happier and more in control. It will be easier to face the challenges that come your way and you will have more energy to deal with fighting the fires that are invariably part of modern living. Taking time for you is not selfish. It will restore your soul, uplift your mood, increase your health and make you more productive and upbeat. ■

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