

Plan yourself a great life.

Relevant to: Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

John Lennon said that life is what happens while you're busy making better plans. Perhaps he might have been better to say "If you are not careful, life is what happens while you are busy making better plans". On the other hand, there is an age-old truism that "those who plan do better than those who don't". So what are we to make of this? Should we be planning our lives or not?



Plan each day.

As ever, the answer lies in balance. If we spend our lives "planning" that one day we will live on a dream island in the Pacific, have a fleet of Ferraris and Bentleys to choose from, and our only worry will be what delicious item to choose for our next meal, then John Lennon's prediction will probably come true and life will pass us by. If, on the other hand, we completely discard the idea of planning, and concentrate completely on being "spontaneous", then we will also be disappointed. As yet another saying informs us, "if you don't know where you are heading, you're unlikely to get there".

You can already plan an excellent life.

That's right, you already have the resources to do that. A friend of mine described how their life had been transformed by simply planning out the evenings. They say that a typical evening now consists of arriving home at 6 p.m. and reading the newspaper. Then at 7 p.m. having dinner with their partner. From 8 p.m. to about 9:30 p.m. they "fiddle

with the computer" by which they mean writing e-mails and so forth. And from 9.30 til bedtime they watch TV with their partner. They describe their plan is just perfect, most evenings.

Another person I know describes their Saturdays as follows: "On Saturday mornings I do a spot of work, but in a leisurely fashion. To catch up on all those things I wish I had done. Then I have lunch at 1p.m. and afterwards I am as idle as I like, right through the afternoon. I might watch a film on TV, or whatever I like. Then on Saturday evening I make a rule to be sociable. To get together with friends, maybe go out for a meal, maybe go round each others' houses, or whatever."

The point of these stories is that you don't need a lot of money to plan yourself out a rewarding time.

Planning usually beats spontaneity.

There is no doubt that "spontaneity" has a role in our lives. It is normally what keeps the primitive brain happy. We "feel like" doing something and so we do it. On the other hand we will never feel particularly "pleased with ourselves" if this is all we do. It is our thinking brain that decides whether or not to feel pleased with ourselves and it is also our thinking brain that plans out our days. So the best idea is usually to plan out what you want to do and try to go with that plan. For sure you will build in spontaneity along the way but not let it rule your life.



What if others won't fit in with my plan?

Planning with others is a skill all of its own. One way of doing it is for everybody to say "what they would do if they were on their own". For example, with a couple planning a weekend. They can then see where the 'overlap points' are and maybe get together at those points. Another way of doing it is to regard both people as one unit, 'an item'. You then have to make a plan for that 'item', and what goes into the plan may not be perfect for either, it is often a matter of compromise. The plan is for the most benefit for the entire unit, rather than either person in it.

Make your plans short term.

You might plan tomorrow, the weekend, the next few days at work. But whatever you plan for a Monday might also do well for the other days in the week too.

What makes for a good plan?

A good plan is a plan that suits you. Don't worry too much about what you 'should' do, mainly make a plan for what you think would suit you best. And once you start doing this, you find that your plans get better, you get to know yourself better and can suit yourself better.

Write it down.

A plan that isn't written down is no plan at all.

Opposite is an example timetable of how someone else may plan their weekend.

In Session.

Alan complains that "every day is the same as every other day". How could he plan out his week to correct this? What exactly might he put into his week?

Chris says that "by the time I get to the weekend I can't be bothered to do anything, but then I'm really bored". How might he plan his way out of this problem? (He also says that once he has planned or promised something, he never goes back on it.)

Evan has an office job - mostly he is on his own in the office. He complains that the days are very long "I get to lunchtime, then the day seems to start all over again". How might he make his afternoons different from the mornings?

Project.

To plan yourself a great day or week, forming a plan that you can use time and again.

Timetable

Example

Saturday	Sunday
8.00: Have breakfast and watch TV with my girlfriend.	9.30: Have breakfast and watch TV with my girlfriend.
9.30: Check emails and look on the net.	11.30: Shower and get ready to go out.
10.00: Shower and get ready to go out.	12.00: Eat out for lunch with friends and girlfriend.
10.30: Go shopping and eat out for lunch with my girlfriend and friends.	3.15: Go to cinema with friends and girlfriend.
3.00: Listen to football on the radio and watch sky sports news.	6.00: Have a bite to eat.
5.30: Check emails and look on the net.	6.30: Check emails and look on the net.
5.45: Have a bite to eat.	7.00: Relax and watch TV.
6.15: Have an hours sleep.	8.00: Have supper with my family and girlfriend.
7.15: Listen to music and get ready to go out.	9.00: Relax and watch a film/TV with family and girlfriend.
8.00: Go for a few drinks with girlfriend and friends.	12.00: Go to bed.
1.30: Go to bed.	

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