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by Elizabeth Grace Saunders

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Remember your new year's resolutions? Are you still doing them?

If the answer is “no,” most likely you fell into the trap that stops most individuals from accomplishing their resolutions: not consciously taking old activities out of their schedule to make

room for the new. It's the equivalent of trying to stuff more papers into a file drawer that's already packed tight or going into debt to cover additional purchases. You can take the pinch for a little while, but soon you're stretched too thin and need to recalibrate to get back to a sustainable lifestyle (or filing system).

Pausing to consider what needs to be removed from your schedule takes time. But it makes all the difference between being busy and being effective. Here are a few strategies that can help you streamline your schedule and build in room to complete your new goals and resolutions.

Question all of your work commitments. In many work environments, tasks and projects get piled on without any clear sense of priorities or time capacity. The beginning of a new year marks the perfect time to clean house and reevaluate what you're doing and how you're doing it.

Start by reviewing your current projects and ask yourself a few questions: Does completing this project still make sense? Am I the correct person to work on this project? Would it be more realistic to move this project to a different quarter? Depending on your position, you may or may not have the ability to make unilateral decisions. But if you've taken the time to step back and consider the big picture, you at least have the opportunity to discuss the possibilities with your boss and your team. One of the fastest ways to complete a project is to decide it's not getting done.

If you're struggling with evaluating your work commitments, it may be helpful to chart your professional commitments. For instance, in my book *The 3 Secrets to Effective Time Investment*, I recommend a chart that includes columns for activity name, type (i.e. constant or varied), hours/month, professional importance, personal satisfaction, optional, and length of term. You can come up with a similar chart with column headings tailored to your situation to evaluate your professional commitments. Then use this data to determine what is the highest value to hold on to and what's best let go.

Once you've determined what you might want to carve out of your schedule, begin to make the shifts in what you're doing. It may take time to get buy-in to eliminate, delay, or delegate projects, but over the course of a few weeks or months you can see your schedule begin to open up.

Reassess your work style. After assessing the "what," turn your attention toward "how" you accomplish work. Reducing meetings can be a powerful force to create space for focused work. Question whether you need meetings for certain projects as well as their length and frequency. For example, going from a weekly 60-minute meeting to a biweekly 45-minute meeting can save each meeting attendee 2.5 hours a month. Multiply that over multiple meetings, and you could get days of your workweek back.

On the other hand, if you find yourself interrupted throughout the day by drive-by questions, consider setting office hours or standing [one-on-one sessions](#) where you make yourself intentionally available. Then define other times where you shut your door — or as one of my time management

coaching clients found to be effective, have it mostly shut. It signals to people to not come in unless it's truly urgent. This lessens the time you spend dealing with interruptions and transitioning back to the task at hand.

Finally, consider if there are ways that you can interact less with messaging technology. Decreasing the amount of time spent on e-mail, social media, or other communication channels can dramatically increase the amount of time you have to get work done as well as the speed at which you can complete it. For me, I've found it helpful to limit the amount of time I can spend on e-mail each day. I also check social media notifications about once a day, strictly limit notifications to my phone, and purposely avoid adopting every new technology. When you're not on something, you don't need to check it.

Add new goals strategically. Once you intentionally create space, you can strategically add in the activities that you want in your life. Sometimes that means simply having the ability to take a break during the day and not work at a frenetic pace, or it may mean moving ahead on an important project you've neglected for months. Or it may mean being able to reduce your hours so instead of working the second shift at night, you're hitting the gym or spending time with family or friends.

To say "yes" to the new, you must say "no" to some of the old. By eliminating some of the activities in your calendar that are no longer the best use of your time, you can finally move ahead on your resolutions. Follow the tips above to make space and intentionally add in what's truly important to you.

Elizabeth Grace Saunders is a [time management coach](#) and the founder of [Real Life E Time Coaching & Speaking](#). She is author of [How to Invest Your Time Like Money](#) and [Divine Time Management](#). Find out more at www.ScheduleMakeover.com.
