

15 Ways to Cure the “Busy Syndrome”

—Stephen Parato



Are you too busy to read this?

Has the word “busy” become a badge of honor for you? If you find yourself constantly saying “I’m busy,” take a step back for a moment and ask “Am I focusing on what really matters?”

“Beware the barrenness of a busy life.” ~ Socrates

In today’s frantically-paced society, we’re becoming increasingly time-stressed. The insidious state of time-poverty has people in a vice grip, to the point that families spend just eight hours per week together on average. And most of that time is spent in silence, in front of the television. That’s a disturbing symptom of something being fundamentally wrong.

Look around you. Most people are in a perpetual state of running around like a chicken with their head cut off. Tense faces, taut bodies and hurried movement are the quiddity of this quizzical culture. Rest? Leisure? Meditation? A walk in the woods? Meaningful conversations with loved ones? In the words of YouTube sensation Sweet Brown, “*Ain’t nobody got time for that.*” A peculiar predicament indeed.

We’ve become the life equivalent of those awkward, neurotic gym-goers; thrusting ourselves in a spastic rehearsal of jerking rapidity, with no concern for technique, let alone the perspective to evaluate if we’re even performing the correct exercise. Doing more and more, faster and faster, has become the unspoken mantra in today’s society. And it couldn’t be more misguided.

Let’s take sprinting (which, by the way, is completely based upon maximum speed) as an example. Do sprinters sprint 24/7? Of course not. They have carefully calculated training programs, with rest being equally as important as the actual training. Sprinters also spend the overwhelming majority of their time resting. Even their training sessions, which include short bursts of high intensity sprinting, are intermixed with much longer periods of rest. If an athlete attempted to sprint unceasingly, they would quickly tire, and within minutes be relegated to crawling around the track.

But this is how many people try to move through life. In a desperate attempt to keep pushing, they end up at an incessant, exhausting crawl with no time to rest (so they think), no energy left to move at full speed and no clarity to even question why they’re doing it in the first place.

“Slow down and remember this: Most things make no difference. Being busy is a form of laziness—lazy thinking and indiscriminate action.” ~ Tim Ferriss

Here’s a little secret. If you learn to be still, build awareness and periodically take strategic, powerful action, you’ll actually accomplish far more, while maintaining your inner peace. How does that sound? I’ve recently unshackled myself from the anxiety-driven confines of the “busy syndrome.” The insatiable urge of self-improvement led me to a wealth of wisdom and practical strategies, which I’ve reverse-engineered into an easily applicable list. So here it is—15 ways to cure the “busy syndrome” and take back your life:

1. Reduce or cut out asinine activities.

The biggest and most obvious culprit here is television. The average American watches about five hours of TV a day. That’s just ridiculous. Imagine the things you could accomplish if you devoted five hours a day to something that actually benefits you. Oh, and did I mention that TV entrains your brain waves into the same frequency as that of hypnosis? It’s called “programming” for a reason.

Besides TV, shopping (for entertainment) can be a big time waster as well. Think about it, you're spending both time and money on things you don't need. And it goes without saying that the mere accumulation of things doesn't equate to sustainable happiness. Cut out the major time wasters and you'll instantly have more time to focus on the things that truly matter.

2. *Value your time.*

You'll never get this moment back. Make the conscious decision to value your time and you'll naturally engage in less useless, busyness. Every moment is a blessing. Deeply realize this. Learn to treasure your experience.

“Time isn't precious at all, because it is an illusion. What you perceive as precious is not time but the one point that is out of time: the Now. That is precious indeed. The more you are focused on time—past and future—the more you miss the Now, the most precious thing there is.” ~ Eckhart Tolle

And valuing your time allows the next step to naturally come to fruition...

3. *Prioritize.*

What is the most important to you? What really matters to you? Prioritize those things. Focus on what really matters to you. It's never really lack of time that prevents you from doing something, it's lack of priority.

“Action expresses priorities.” ~ Mahatma Gandhi

4. *Be present.*

Slow down and breathe. Recognize that all you have is the moment. Recognize that all negative emotions stem from losing touch with the present moment. Presence and neurotic busyness simply cannot coexist.

5. *Balance activity with rest.*

Just as you need activity to accomplish something, you need to rest to support your activity. Meditate, take a walk outside, get a good night's sleep or read a book. Life is a delicate dance of the yin and yang. Approach life like a sprinter, as described above, and you will excel.

6. *Be a time management ninja.*

Get creative with your time. Listen to podcasts or audiobooks while driving or cleaning, work out during your lunch break, work out while you're playing with your kids, read

while you're waiting for appointments or write a book on a flight (Deepak Chopra does this). If you get creative with your time, you'll be able to get a lot more done.

7. Take breaks.

Almost counter-intuitively, breaks are invaluable in getting things done. We only have a finite attention span. The longer you continuously do something, the less productive you become. In the book "The 4-Hour Chef," Tim Ferriss graphs the percentage of recall (related to memorizing or studying something) during periods of time. He proposed that over the course of 90 minutes, your recall percentage will dip to around 30 percent by the middle of the session, before rising again towards the end. But if you work for two 45 minute sessions, with a five to 10 minute break in between, your recall percentage won't fall below 50 percent at any time. So you'll be far more effective and prolific by working in shorter bursts and taking breaks.

Don't think you're better off by stubbornly trudging through something. Take breaks and increase your productivity.

8. Apply the 80-20 rule.

The 80-20 rule, or Pareto's Principle, states that 80 percent of the effects come from 20 percent of the causes. 80 percent of your results will come from 20 percent of your activities. Figure out what that 20 percent is for you and make them your primary focus. Work smarter, not harder.

9. Stop being a victim.

Drop the victim mentality and empower yourself. A lot of people get into the habit of complaining about how busy they are, while doing nothing to change it. Victimhood can be addictive, and many attach their sense of self to "being busy." You'll never break out of a pattern until you make the conscious decision that you want to.

10. "Don't confuse activity for accomplishment."

That is quite the compelling quote by Zig Ziglar. Focus on results, not time spent. And here's another quote for good measure:

"Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things." ~ Peter Drucker

11. Sleep.

Better sleep quality enables you to be way more productive throughout the day. Lack of sleep results in lower cognitive function, foggy-headedness, fatigue (obviously) and a compromised immune system. It's hard to think clearly, or operate at full capacity, if you're tired and sick all the time.

12. Go on a “low information diet.”

Living in a state of TMI (Too Much Information) can keep you in the dreaded “busy zone.” With the sheer amount of information out there, it’s easy to waste time consuming the unnecessary. Also, information overload can leave you in a state of paralysis by analysis, leaving you ineffective at accomplishing the things that matter. Limit your sources of information and focus on creation as opposed to absorption.

13. Avoid the woes of decision fatigue.

There is a phenomenon aptly named “decision fatigue” which affirms that the more decisions you make throughout the day, the more you deplete your willpower. So you’re more likely to make bad or unfavorable decisions toward the end of a long, decision-filled day. The solution? Do your most important work and make your most important decisions early in the day, while making less decisions overall. This will greatly increase effectiveness and help you avoid “busy syndrome.”

14. Do what you need to do first.

Don’t put pressure on yourself to instantly respond to everyone. You don’t need to immediately reply to every email, text or whatever message you get. Unless it’s an absolute emergency, it can wait. Your inbox is essentially a to-do list for other people, not yourself. And it can easily lead you down rabbit holes of unimportant tasks. Many of the most productive people only check email once or twice a day, limit their internet usage and take steps to avoid distractions from their primary task at hand. Focus on what you need to do, first and foremost. That’s how you become the best version of yourself, and interestingly enough, build an even greater capacity to give.

15. Don’t take life too seriously.

So much busy neurosis stems from fear. If you just relax into the present moment, you’ll be more productive while sustaining your sanity. You might even start finding fun in the most unexpected places.

“Nothing in the affairs of man is worthy of any great anxiety.” ~ Plato

Make the most out of your experience called life.