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For more than 20 years, Nicole has held executive and leadership positions in the human services arena. She is also a certified mediator and a member of the International Association of Coaches.

Those who coach with Nicole come away with clarity of purpose, well-established goals and a renewed mindset toward their personal and professional priorities.

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Empower. Enlighten. Enrich. Equip. Encourage.

A Newsletter of Personal
& Professional Results
from Nicole Kirksey
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Healthy Ways to Control Your Life

We all know people who need control and put all their energies into asserting and maintaining it—often with unfortunate results. That kind of control can lead to rigidity, stifled relationships and, ironically, elevated stress, as life in all its messiness continues on its own course despite all attempts to make it mind.

Taking healthy control of your life is another matter. When you do that, you feel empowered and confident. The trick is recognizing when and where to grab the reins and when to surrender.

Here, then, is a four-fold strategy for taking control in ways that enrich your life.

1. Limit the Area You Seek To Control

A big part of healthy control is *focus*, knowing what to pursue and what to let go. Overly general and ambitious goals can increase feelings of helplessness or anxiety. Narrow your focus to what's most important.

2. Think Through Desired Results and Methods

When you have a goal that you want to attain, devising an *achievable* plan can do wonders for your spirits and sense of mastery. Take your notebook or laptop to a private place where you won't be disturbed and write about what you want and ways you can achieve it.

At first, spend some time brainstorming about methods without worrying about practicality—you never know what truly practical and do-able plan lies just behind that pie-in-the-sky solution.

Once you've explored your options, select two that

you can implement and devote yourself to making them happen.

3. Organize Your Time and Space

Another aspect of being in positive control is being able to get things done. However, technologies we've created to simplify our lives sometimes make us virtual slaves. If your cell phone and email distract you more than they serve you, set up boundaries around their use. For instance, you might set aside particular times for checking email rather than responding every time you hear one arrive.

Crowded, inefficient workspaces rob you of energy. One of the best ways to restore direction and movement is to reorganize your space so that it works for you, not against you.

Be careful that you don't create overly ambitious reorganization plans that can backfire by creating more work and guilt feelings if you don't follow through. Make your tasks attainable and give yourself a reasonable time to achieve them.

4. Deal with that Inner Clutter Too

Our minds can also clog up with outworn notions, negative habits of thought, unforgiven mistakes we carry from past relationships and old stories about who we are. As you throw out the literal debris, seek to uncover and eliminate this inner detritus as well.

Those old ideas and beliefs rob you of the present, and only in the present do you truly control your life. ●

Top 10 Questions to Ask Yourself – Regularly

Just like doing maintenance on your car, it's a good idea to do a personal check-in to keep yourself on track.

- 1. Is there something I need to do that I haven't done?** Then ask yourself: what's in the way?
- 2. Am I resisting something?** Sometimes what we most resist could provide the greatest opportunity for growth.
- 3. Am I holding on to something I need to let go of?** Letting go can be difficult, but it's the only way to move forward.
- 4. Am I repeating old patterns?** If the same problems keep showing up in different clothes, it might be time to dig deep into the bottom of this closet.

5. Is there something for me to learn here?

Resistance, holding on, repeating patterns often indicate a life lesson.

6. Am I staying in the present? Time spent regretting the past and worrying about the future is time lost in the present.

7. Am I asking for what I need and want?

8. Am I taking good care of myself? Check in with the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of your life.

9. Am I at peace with people, places and things in my life?

10. Am I having fun at least some of the time? ●

Self-Quiz

Do You Fight Fairly?

Most of us would avoid fighting if we could. After all, it's not very comfortable. However, personal growth is often attained through some kind of challenge. Fighting fairly and skillfully is the key to allowing conflict to serve us rather than do harm. Answer the following questions to discover if you are fighting fairly:

True False

Set 1

- 1. When people hurt me or make me angry, I'm likely to fight back or be defensive.
- 2. If someone brings up a subject I don't want to discuss, I ignore him or her or refuse to talk about it.
- 3. I tend to build up resentments over time, and then let them all out in one big blow-up.
- 4. I sometimes cut people out of my life when they don't agree with me or give me what I want.
- 5. I'll be taken advantage of or hurt if I show any vulnerability.
- 6. I withhold love and connection when I don't get my way.
- 7. I try to get more support for my point of view by getting others on my side.
- 8. I have a tendency to "leak" my resentments rather than being open and direct about my feelings.

Set 2

- 1. I use "I" statements to express my feelings and avoid blaming and telling the other person what he/she feels.
- 2. I am committed to listening and being openheartedly curious when quarreling so that I can truly understand what the other person is feeling, thinking and experiencing.
- 3. I am able to express my anger, and I hold a safe space for others to express their anger towards me.
- 4. I consciously create time and space for resolving conflicts rather than arguing when either of us is in the midst of other things.
- 5. Resolving conflict successfully often leads to greater intimacy and authenticity.
- 6. It's important that the other person and I each have time to share our feelings without being interrupted.
- 7. I avoid holding grudges by expressing my feelings as soon as possible—that way resentments don't build up.
- 8. I try to find a win-win solution in any conflict; I'm willing to negotiate until both of us are satisfied.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may want to learn some communication skills to help you fight fairly. Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like support with this. ●



What creative leaps do you need to make?

Recommended Reading

The Fifth Agreement: A Practical Guide to Self-Mastery, by don Miguel Ruiz and don Jose Ruiz

Find Your Purpose, Change Your Life: Getting to the Heart of Your Life's Mission, by Carol Adrienne

Experience Your Good Now!: Learning to Use Affirmations, by Louise Hay

Fearless Living: Live Without Excuses and Love Without Regret, by Rhonda Britten

The Secret of the Shadow: The Power of Owning Your Whole Story, by Debbie Ford

Change Your Thoughts - Change Your Life, by Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

"If one is out of touch with oneself; then one cannot touch others."

—Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Overcoming Overwhelm by Coming Back to Ourselves

Look in any thesaurus, and the synonyms for Overwhelm are pretty awful: overpower, subdue, oppress, quash, engulf, swallow, submerge, bury, suffocate.

Groan.

To anyone who's experienced overwhelm, and that's plenty of us, those words may be all too familiar. Whether the overwhelm is sudden or cumulative, chronic or acute, the feeling is one of drowning, immobility and powerlessness.

During those times, everything feels too big. It's not just everyday busyness and packed schedules. When we're overwhelmed, making dinner becomes a monumental effort. Better eat out. Bills, housework? Forget it. Tasks that used to take only 10 or 15 minutes now seem utterly impossible. There seems to be no time for *anything*. So we do nothing.

Worse, we have no faith that this, too, shall pass. We seem hopelessly mired in the quicksand of "too much." We keep trying to will our way out of the quicksand with a will that just wants to lie down.

We live in a very overwhelming time—much more so than in decades past, says Jan Boddie, Ph.D., a California therapist who trains individuals and consults with businesses on the topic.

Things are speeding up. Technology's well-touted time saving seems to have yielded less leisure time, not more. Companies are demanding longer work hours. Many adults are sandwiched between the needs of older and younger generations.

"We have really lost connection, not just with nature, but with our own true human nature," Boddie says. "We're sidetracked.

Our lives are in such fast forward that we don't even recognize we might need help until we're drowning."

Part of the problem is the cultural belief system in place, one that overrates doing and achievement and underrates quality of experience and connection with values.

In that cultural mindset, it's not uncommon for a friend or a magazine article, with all good intention, to suggest the "Nike solution": Just do it. *Make priorities. Choose three things and accomplish them quickly. Go through the mail as soon as it arrives. Do a "brain dump" and create a huge to-do list with everything that you can think of on it. Now get started!*

Not bad suggestions necessarily, but overcoming overwhelm isn't really about measuring accomplishment. It's about connecting with what has meaning

for us, with what feeds and enlivens us.

"Putting on a whole new sense of doing-ness is overwhelming," Boddie says. "It creates a future-based state of mind that never ends because there will always be more to do. Being in relationship with what has meaning is fulfilling in the here and now. Feeling connected then connects us to the natural fuel for getting things done."

Thus, when we come into alignment with our values and needs, we find the inner resources and spaciousness needed to get on with life.

First, however, we need to identify our individual symptoms and triggers for overwhelm. Our symptoms can be physical (e.g., nail biting, clumsiness, neck ache); psychological (forgetful, rude, defensive); social (poor hygiene, inadequate boundaries); or spiritual (loss of sense of purpose, unsure of what's important).

Triggers are just as individual: a deadline, a certain tone of voice, change.

Noticing these symptoms and triggers is like setting off the two-minute warning buzzer: time for intervention techniques. It's helpful to make a list of those techniques when you're not overwhelmed and keep a copy handy to call upon when you need it.

A few of those strategies might include:

- Breathe. Remember the breath's metaphor: Let in; let go.
- Dance alone, with or without music. Let your body lead the way.
- Listen to violin, cello or piano music. Let the music elicit tears.
- Watch a funny video. Laughter has a positive effect on brain chemistry.
- Go for a walk. Exercise increases adrenaline and endorphins, the body's natural antidepressants.
- Lie on the grass outside. Connect with the earth's regenerating powers.

After you've come back to yourself, start on your prevention techniques, such as adequate rest, good nutrition, a healthy amount of exercise and, as always, connection to purpose. With a little practice, you can prevent overwhelm and improve the quality of your life. ●

BEYOND the Box

The following questions are designed to broaden perspectives, to open vistas, to widen the lens. There is no one right way to approach them. You can journal about them, talk to friends, create art, ponder them while driving, talk to your dog, dance them—whatever helps you explore "outside the box."

1. What "inner clutter" is crowding my inner world? What would be available to me if I cleaned out one of those closets?
2. What one change to my physical space would free up energy for me and/or increase efficiency and focus?
3. What does living in the present look and feel like? When do I find it challenging to stay in the present?
4. What questions can I ask myself daily?
5. How comfortable am I with my own or another's anger?
6. Which unproductive way of handling conflict do I tend to employ (leaking resentment, lashing out)?
7. What "symptoms" tell me that I'm overwhelmed, and what situations trigger it? What's gotten me out of overwhelm in the past?
8. How can I exercise my "joy muscles" daily?
9. What is feeling time-deprived costing me?
10. What truly nurtures me? What is the relationship between nurturing myself and my sense of time?

To Do—Today!

1. Inhale
2. Exhale
3. Inhale
4. Exhale
5. Inhale
6. Exhale

To Make Time, Take Time

If time were an animal, it would be on the endangered species list. At least that's how it seems: Too much to do, too many places to be, too little time to do it all.

On the job, in school, at home, we are increasingly imprisoned by the perception that time is a scarce and limited resource. We rush from one commitment or activity to another and believe that we haven't a minute to spare. We yearn for more time, yet we often feel anxious and guilty when idle.

Is this how life is supposed to be?

No! Nor does it have to be.

But until we change our relationship to time, our lives will continue to speed away from us—at enormous cost to our health and to our experience of ourselves and the world around us.

"There is no issue, no aspect of human life, that exceeds this in importance," says Jacob Needleman, author of *Time and the Soul*. "The destruction of time is literally the destruction of life."

When we learn to shift time, our relationships become more rewarding, our time spent alone is richer, our work is more fruitful and stress and anxiety lessen.

To allow time to "breathe" more in your life, try the following suggestions from Stephan Rechtschaffen, author of *Timeshifting*.

Pause. Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Han suggests taking a deep breath before answering the phone. Other conscious pauses throughout the day—a moment of silence before each meal, sitting in the car a few minutes before entering the house after work—

help us to "come home" to ourselves.

Carve out idle time alone. Just because you're not doing anything doesn't mean that nothing's getting done.

Live as fully as possible in the present moment. When we leave behind thoughts of the past or future, we can experience time more peacefully, says Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now*.

Toss your schedule whenever you can. Even better, schedule spontaneous time and then surprise yourself.

Examine underlying reasons for your busyness. What emotions would you experience if you weren't so busy? What would you wish for?

Play. Whether you sing, wrestle, paint, shake your bootie—whatever—play helps us to step outside of ordinary time.

Create time retreats. Once a year or so, do something for at least a week that allows you to shift into a different rhythm—where you can just "be."

Spend time in nature. We can't help but slow down in nature's unhurried pace. Watching a soaring bird seems to stretch a minute into an hour.

We needn't be at time's mercy. When we change our awareness, we can actually experience the gifts of time. ●



—Albert Schweitzer

"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful."

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