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## Your Time is Your Life— Invest it Well

Elizabeth Grace Saunders



Now is a time of revolution—or perhaps more precisely an evolution—in the world of personal productivity. Time management no longer offers sufficient support for people overwhelmed with the onslaught of responsibility and opportunity in today’s 24/7 world. The next step: Time Investment.

So what exactly is time investment and how am I so confident that it will make all your wildest dreams come true? (OK, maybe not all of them, but most!) As a time coach and trainer who has worked with clients on six continents, I’ve seen first-hand what it takes to achieve lasting change in how you invest your time. I share these secrets in *The 3 Secrets to Effective Time Investment: How to Achieve More Success With Less Stress* but at the foundation of everything stands the truth that we must shift from an emphasis on time management to one of time investment in order to live the richest life possible.

To practice effective time investment you must embrace these four principles:

1. You Can't Do Everything
2. Strategic Time Allocation
3. Automatic Time Investment
4. Consistently Not Constantly

## You Can't Do Everything

Ironically, the people with the most time and autonomy can end up the most miserable because their relative freedom makes them hold onto the false notion that they can do everything. But the truth is that, even if you have copious amounts of time and resources, you still need to make choices. Failing to do so will lead to an unsatisfying lack of depth and closure in your life.

Don't want to believe me? Think back to a time when you said "Yes" but then didn't have time to complete the activity. Or maybe you did keep your commitment, but only by going to bed at 2 a.m. How did that feel? Pretty uncomfortable, right? Well, what happened in that situation is that you put yourself in time debt by writing an IOU for an activity that you didn't have sufficient time funds to cover. Time debt can debilitate you as much as financial debt—if you let it.

But what's wonderful about embracing this concept that "You Can't Do Everything" and the truth that "Reality Always Wins" is that it then frees you to say, "No" without guilt. This in turn keeps you from living an "overdrawn" life. With an awareness of your time budget, you no longer see declining opportunities as rudeness but as honestly living in accordance with the realities of the time you have to spend.

If you've tried to sustain the illusion that you CAN do everything and constantly feel behind, miss deadlines, and disappoint yourself and others, then to embrace this truth may initially feel like an affront to your pride. "I don't want to admit defeat!" an inner voice stubbornly retorts. But by grieving what you can't do now, releasing it, and accepting your true capacity, you will achieve more of what matters to you. Plus, just because you can't do something now, doesn't mean it will never come back into your schedule later.

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# Strategic Time Allocation

So if you can't do everything, how do you decide on your limits? How do you live within reality but not settle for less than your best? Great questions. The way I look at this is as a process of strategic time allocation. If it helps, you can think of it like you would an investment portfolio. Within your portfolio, you want different types of funds and you want them to fall within the proper allocation. That's why you "rebalance" on a regular basis to get those percentages to the correct level. In the same way, you want to come up with the generally correct allocation of your time funds and then rebalance regularly.

The right allocation varies for each person but the mathematical formula remains the same:

## **Total Time Cost of the Day's Commitments = 24 Hours**

For some areas, calculating how much time cost it takes of the daily total will be more straightforward. For example, sleep could take seven hours off of your daily total or commuting could take two hours off of your daily weekday time total.

But what about more abstract priorities, like spending time with family? In those areas, you need to first translate your abstract priorities into action-based priorities. (This step is so important that Clarify Action-Based Priorities is one of the three secrets in my book.)

So in the case of family, your action-based priorities could be “eat family dinner” and “spend quality time with my spouse.” Then from your new-found clarity on the specific action goals, you could determine that you need to deduct 1.5 to 2 hours from your daily total to account for the “family time” priority.

For one-off activities like writing an op-ed piece for the local newspaper or planning a trip, you need to consider your time allocation a little differently. First off, you should try to estimate about how long it will take you to complete the project. Then, look to see where you have gaps of time in your schedule such as a free Wednesday night or Saturday afternoon. Then make a note in your calendar to remind yourself that time is allocated for a specific task. This strategy of filling in activities during the times you actually have the ability to execute on them will help you have a realistic sense of your time budget.

As you work on your time allocation and time budget, keep in mind the entire “time cost” of an activity. For instance, you may think of a 60-minute exercise class as only taking one hour of your time. But in reality it takes 20 minutes to get to the gym and change and 15 minutes to get home afterward so you need to allocate 95 minutes in total. If you find the numbers don’t add up, you’ll need to either cut the number of commitments in your calendar, spend less time on some of them so you have more time for others, or slow the pace at which you plan to get items done.

Quite often, you have more options than you think if you are willing to take ownership of your priorities and to make adjustments to put your time investment in alignment with them.

## Automatic Time Investment

But how does this actually work? When you barely have enough mental capacity to stay awake in meetings, let alone think about allocating time to your action-based priorities, how do you keep this up? The secret lies in routines.

Strengthening simple routines allows you to create the right paths of least resistance so that the easiest possible movement aligns with your priorities. For instance, if you decide that you want to allocate time toward exercising each day, you could set up a routine that you meet your neighbor at 6 a.m. every morning to go on a walk. Knowing that someone will be standing outside your door waiting for you creates great motivation to wake up and get moving.

The same type of method can work with an evening ritual to connect with your spouse and get to bed on time. Every evening at 10:30 p.m., you could rendezvous in the living room to talk through your days before you go to bed.

For less frequent activities, the routine to strengthen involves two steps

1) immediately putting time commitments onto your calendar on a day when you hope to accomplish them

2) checking your calendar daily.

You'll need to experiment a bit to figure out which routines work best for you. But then once you do, groove them. Don't trust yourself, trust your structure.

*“Strengthening simple routines allows you to create the right paths of least resistance so that the easiest possible movement aligns with your priorities.”*



# Consistently Not Constantly

This whole idea of automatic time investment may make you feel nervous if your nature tends toward the spontaneous and/or the perfectionist side of the spectrum. A spontaneous person will ask, “Well, what if I want to do something different than my routine dictates?” My response: You can give yourself freedom to choose not to follow your routine. You just want to make sure that you have the routine in place so that the choice to deviate from it is a conscious one instead of a result of happenstance. Your routine is your servant, not your master, and you can decide that following it at times has less value than the opportunity to do something different.

Perfectionists can struggle with routines because they fear that they won't have the ability to follow them perfectly all the time—and they're right. But that doesn't mean that routines can't help you lead a more perfect life, instead it means that you need to focus on doing things consistently, not constantly. If four nights a week you make it home for dinner on time, that's much better than never eating together as a family because you're afraid to set a timeline you may miss every once in a while. If you do find that you can't keep a routine even consistently, you don't need to get mad at yourself. Instead you can evaluate what is or is not working with the routine and adjust it until you can stick with it on a regular basis.

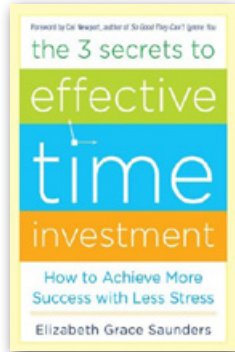
# Why Make The Effort?

As you read this manifesto, you may start to think that time investment sounds like a great deal of work. That perception has some truth to it: The initial process of deciding on your time allocation and setting up your routines will take mental effort and self discipline. However, once you get the right routines in place, keeping at them can become relatively effortless.

But even more importantly, when you practice effective time investment, you give yourself the ability to craft a life without regrets. Your time is your life. If you let it pass you by without intentionally deciding how you want to use each moment, you will most likely end up with a life created by the external stimuli around you.

**If you take the time to think about what actions would put your time investment in alignment with your highest goals, then you give yourself the opportunity to look back over your life and to say that you lived a life authentic to the true you. 📖**

# Info



**BUY THE BOOK** | Get more details or buy a copy of [The 3 Secrets to Effective Time Investment](#).

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** | Elizabeth Grace Saunders is the founder & CEO of Real Life E Time Coaching & Training. Elizabeth works one-on-one with coaching clients around the world to empower them to accomplish more with peace and confidence through her exclusive Schedule Makeover process. Her training programs assist organizations in improving employees' job satisfaction, productivity, and work/life balance. Elizabeth regularly contributes articles on effective time investment to *Harvard Business Review*, *Lifehacker*, *The Huffington Post*, and *99U*. Find out more at [www.ScheduleMakeover.com](http://www.ScheduleMakeover.com).

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