

# Manage Your Time or Others Will Do It for You by Harvey Mackay

I'll never forget an important time management lesson I learned in a seminar many years ago... especially how the instructor illustrated the point.

"Okay, time for a quiz," he said, as he pulled out a one-gallon wide-mouthed mason jar and set it on the desk in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is the jar full?"

Everyone in the seminar said, "Yes."

Then he said, "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar. This caused pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Then he asked the group again, "Is the jar full?"

By this time the class was on to him. "Probably not," we answered.

"Good!" he replied as he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?"

"No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"

One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you really try hard, you can always fit some things into it."

"No," the instructor replied. "The point is if you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

So, today, tonight, or in the morning when you are reflecting on this story, ask yourself: What are the 'big rocks' in my life or business? Then, be sure to put those in your jar first. And by the way, you get the same size jar as everyone else. No exceptions.

What changes from person to person is the size of each rock. I've got a couple boulders in my jar: family first, always. Things like friends, my company, my speaking and writing "hobby," maintaining my network, my volunteer commitments, my health, and my religion all take up a lot of space. The gravel is all the stuff that takes up more than a few minutes but doesn't necessarily happen every day, like a committee assignment, a vacation, learning new software... you get the idea.

And now, the sand. You can decide whether to be that 98-pound weakling who gets sand kicked at him, or the creator of a spectacular sand castle. The sand is the yes/no stuff that absolutely has to fit around everything else after it's in the jar. A little piece of sand in your eye is a big pain, and those are the ones that get the no-thank-you right off the bat. A little sand on an icy street is one of life's little pleasures when you live in snow country as I do. You choose the sand. It's your jar.

In other words, it's your time. Change the rocks, gravel and sand into hours, minutes and seconds. Then decide what your priorities are and how much time you'll spend on them. If you don't, someone else will decide for you and you'll end up with a jar full of heavy, jagged, nasty shards that nobody could touch without getting stabbed by another rock. Do you really want to spend your time working on other people's priorities?

As Benjamin Franklin said, "If we take care of the minutes, the years will take care of themselves." Good time management is taking care of the things that matter most to us first and keeping that jar of rocks in sight all the time.

My friend Lou Holtz has a great formula: W.I.N.—What's Important Now? Use some of your precious time to figure out what's important in your life and you will win.