

## You are how you spend your time

**"Who am I?" It might seem an unusual first line for a book on time management, but Santiago Álvarez de Mon of IESE argues that self-knowledge is key to improving schedules and personal and professional efficiency.**



February 13, 2017

How do we balance the time spent on work, personal relationships, education, culture, leisure and rest? What do we prioritize? These are some of the questions raised by IESE professor [Santiago Álvarez de Mon](#) in a [2017 book](#) that aims to help us "rethink our relationship with

time."

The author uses time as a reliable clue to reach a state of deeper self-knowledge. In this vein, an agenda serves as an essential tool for diagnosis and self-improvement on the subject of living in the present and focusing on the here and now.

## **Establish the essentials, discard the superfluous**

The quality of our leadership, relationships, professional careers, leisure and even health depends heavily on our relationship with time, Álvarez de Mon asserts. Our use of this most finite of resources explains the true nature and scope of our values and priorities.

This is precisely why we need to conduct a full review of our hourly calendar. Such a review may offer us some balance in order to enable us to wrap our minds around the activity at hand. And we may learn what our habits, achievements, interests and dreams say about us.

Returning to business, after taking this realistic, honest and humble look at our calendar, we need to reflect on the roles and responsibilities inherent in our professional performance. Which tasks are essential? Which decisions need to be made? Which responsibilities must be assumed?

Then, we must look at what we need to stop doing. It is essential that we learn to say no. Saying yes all the time can be an easy shortcut to avoiding conflict, but an apropos and reasonable "no" can lay the foundations for a mature relationship. Saying "no" does nothing to isolate or diminish us; in fact, it contextualizes all the times we have said "yes," making them more valuable.

With the unnecessary or impossible eliminated, what remains is a list of personal and professional duties, projects and challenges that have been on hold all this time; important issues that had not yet become urgent.

Leisure, understood as an opportunity to cultivate our own personality and character, also contains a wealth of diagnostic information. Our tastes, pastimes, hobbies, and relationships with family, friends and wider society collectively paint a crisp yet nuanced portrait.

The balance is to be found in plurality. Work and leisure are two sides of the same vital coin, and we must share our time between them.

## The here and now

In the overstimulated digital world, in which mental channel-surfing is the norm, exercising memory, sustaining attention and focusing on the present count as true accomplishments.

Intelligently developing a fresh and harmonious relationship with time, where we can live in the present and also work toward our future aims, is an act of willpower that demands a continuous exercise of character, explains Álvarez de Mon.

The author insists that the best medicine is to tackle one thing at a time, keeping in mind the factors that can improve concentration and maintain energy:

- We are more likely to focus if an activity is connected to our preferences, abilities and tastes.
- When we lose our focus, the best thing to do is acknowledge it, go back to where we got off track, and refocus.
- It is helpful to take short breaks to recharge our batteries. Without scheduled pauses, our minds tend to wander.

Álvarez de Mon also recommends that we train our mental, emotional and spiritual abilities, just as we train physically. This might include:

- Ordering options in terms of importance.
- Turning decisions into concrete actions, defined in time and space.
- Practicing and repeating, to transition sporadic behavior to ingrained good habits.

Moreover, a key skill is developing patience, which makes time a trusted ally rather than a capricious tyrant.

Living in the present means keeping our focus on the process of our actions, not the result. We must weigh the consequences, but without obsessively trying to understand every aspect of them.

Accustomed to looking forever forward and backward, we often focus on the length of our lives rather than on the breadth that each day can offer us. And as the author reminds us, the broader it is, the more people and learning can fit into it, and the more chances we have for a long and fruitful journey.

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