



# the balancing act

*time can be on your side!*

It's about time. Time management, making time, wasting time, wondering where the time went. It's about time busy women started getting things back in balance so they run their lives, not the other way around.

Ever wonder where the day went? Ever think that the answer was to get up earlier and go to bed later, all in an effort

to carve out some time for yourself? Maybe it's time to do so now, as we say goodbye to the loose summer days, pack the kids off to school and head back to an office operating at full capacity again. It's time to re-prioritize, reorganize and regain control of our lives before the full brunt of the fall schedule and then the holiday season comes screaming into our lives.

For many women, September brings a feeling of anticipation mixed with dread.

We positively anticipate the change of pace, yet many of us also dread the return of routine that can often feel like entrapment: the return to weekly activities for kids, the return of rushing to get dinner on the table before

a club meeting, hockey or other activity. And the return of longer days at the office because gone is the regard for casual, summer-based schedules.

So it's not anything new or surprising that many women think

of September, rather than January, as the start of a new year. With that in mind, Real Women London has made its own list of resolutions and sought out some professional help to make them happen.

Number one on the list is restructuring life's demands so that we – as women who lead households, careers and businesses – are making life's decisions and not just reacting, knee-jerk, to life coming at us.

According to Blair Henry, people can only begin to make more sense of the chaos when they truly realize that they "have to do something." Henry owns The Motivational Coach ([www.motivationalcoach.ca](http://www.motivationalcoach.ca)), a London business that teaches people how to bring order to timelines and schedules. He coaches 12 business owners for one year and has a step-by-step plan that lays out how to set what he calls "priorities and posterities."

His mantra is to start writing things down – not to just keep mental lists and thoughts.

"Take that time to write. The pen has the amazing ability to heal and give clarity of thought. As the ink comes to the page you find insights that you don't get from just thinking," says Henry.

He suggests we write about our vision for an ideal life and an ideal lifestyle.

"We're talking about the present. What changes today would make you most happy? Then do the gap analysis. What steps do you need to take to get from A to B?"

Of course it all sounds like common sense. It's also the kind of wisdom that not all of us put into practice because we're too busy making excuses for why we're so overwhelmed, tired, or frustrated by our schedules. So, action is required.

Henry's favourite saying is that we need to remove the word "try" from our lexicon and instead use "do."

For Henry – and me, for that matter – a big issue is clutter. He says his problem was lack of organization within his home, where he also has his office. However, he advises that it's simply unworkable to write down that one wants to be more organized. This goal needs to be broken down into doable tasks, which need to be repeated for 28 days. In Henry's case the doable task was to put things away after he used them. (Gee, didn't we learn that lesson in kindergarten? Now may be the perfect time to bring the lesson back to the forefront.) After 28 days, he has clients refocus on their problem. Four months later, they have to focus on the solution again for 48 hours, to reinforce the routine.

He also has clients call a family meeting to communicate in a positive way changes that need to take place to make the life/work balance more manageable. He encourages people to set priority time and then mark it on a calendar in 30-minute segments, building up to 90-minute slots, so they can focus on things in life that bring them passion.

"This is the concept of being unwaveringly selfish. We need to protect our happiness and our creative self in order to be the best we can be and to focus on all the other demands we have," he says.

To do so requires the ability to set goals at this time of year by writing them down. Henry advises that the goals be time-bounded, with obstacles detailed in writing. We also need to write down how people can help us and what we can do ourselves to reach the goal. We then create a plan of action followed by a

general statement with clearly-defined benefits for everyone involved. Henry says that all parties have to feel they can answer the question, "What's in it for me?" for the plan to work.

So, if the goal is a less-cluttered house, then everyone has to see the benefits: kids having more space and everyone finding life less stressful in a more organized home. A more organized living space will allow priority time for the things we really enjoy, be they sports, reading or simple relaxation.

Finally, we all need to remove some "posterities" from our lives: things or events at the bottom of our list of goals, such as a club or housework. Something's gotta give but it can't be our passion time.

While Henry helps sort out your mindset, Bobbi Hoffman offers a practical way to organize your home. With her business, Clear the Way ([www.cleartheway.ca](http://www.cleartheway.ca)), she is one of a growing number of professional organizers who have taken courses through the Professional Organizers

of Canada and through an American group, the National Study Group of Chronic Disorganization.

"When people call me or other organizers, they're ready to make changes but this can also make them nervous. Some people don't want you coming into their space, especially those who don't want to let go of things. So I really have to coax some people through the process," says Hoffman.

One of the biggest clutter issues in our lives is paper, she explains, and despite advances in technology such as digital cameras, we tend to spend even more time now than before fiddling with stuff instead of being organized.

"Baby boomers haven't had the opportunity to get all their pictures, papers or affairs in order, although they know that it's important to do," she says.

Hoffman likes to work one on one and often assigns "homework" to clients, which cuts down on her fees and also helps the client take ownership of the project. The key is to start small and be realistic. Hoffman also advises against tackling more than one room, or even one corner, at a time.

"Set aside 15 minutes a day and stay focused in that area. Be easy on yourself," she says.


By removing stuff from our lives, it actually makes us feel like we've "gotten the monkey off our back," explains Hoffman, and we can then go on to live happier and more productive lives. She says that once people clean out the stuff, they're amazed at how they tend not to refill the closets so quickly

again, which allows them more time to do other things rather than shopping.

While Hoffman advises it's better to have help with these projects to keep motivated, she also recommends several websites for the do-it-yourselfers and those looking for more information. They include:

- [www.juliemorgenstern.com](http://www.juliemorgenstern.com)
- [www.getorganizednow.com](http://www.getorganizednow.com)
- [www.lifeorganizers.com](http://www.lifeorganizers.com)

And remember: those reality TV shows that depict a house being de-junked in 30 minutes have about 100 people working behind the scenes. Gosh, now that's just what I need for my basement!

So don't let September be the month of dread. Take it as an opportunity to liberate your life by gaining control of the chaos. It's about time. 

BY JANE ANTONIAK

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