

Inc. COLUMNIST

Project 123: The Simplest Strategy For Getting Things Done

When you get overwhelmed by all of the complex and multiplying tasks competing for your time, it can help to sit back and identify Project One, Two, and Three.



By [Joelle K. Jay@JoelleKJay](mailto:JoelleKJay)



IMAGE: Getty Images

I often write on my column about "maximizing your time" as opposed to "work-life balance," because the former implies that you have some control or say in the matter. And you do! You *are* in control of your time--although, when you realize the truth of that, you may suddenly feel a little overwhelmed. Maximizing your time is a big responsibility and a far cry from just giving over to the busy craziness of life (as many of us usually do).

If you're feeling overwhelmed by all you have to do and want to take control, here's a strategy that can help. It's called Project 123.

This strategy came up one time when I was--of all things redecorating my house. I have since made it a staple in my time-planning techniques and use it anytime there simply seems to be too much to do to fit the time I have.

One day years ago, my friend and decorator arrived to help me redecorate a room. One room. We sat in that room, the living room, and talked about ideas. Before we knew what was happening, we had moved to another room (more ideas) and another (more ideas) and another (still more). In an hour we had whipped ourselves into a fervor of bathroom remodels and office reorganization and new paint on every wall. When she left, I closed the door, turned around, and thought, "What just happened? And where will we ever start?" It felt so overwhelming, I just walked away and left it all behind.

The next day, the decorator emailed me her project proposal. It said in big letters, PROJECT ONE: The Living Room. Oh, yes, I thought. Project One. The living room was my original motivation for calling the decorator! She remembered when I had forgotten: There was one priority. A place to start. Later, we could move to Project Two (the TV room) and Project Three (the home office). The way she crystallized our plans into a logical order, they all made sense again, and we tackled them one at a time.

When you get overwhelmed by all of the complex and multiplying tasks competing for your time, it can help to sit back and identify Project One, Two, and Three. George Leonard of Mastery captures the essence of this strategy well. He writes, "Ultimately, liberation comes through the acceptance of limits. You can't do everything, but you can do one thing, and then another, and then another."

You can use this strategy to choose one focus area or one action item to tackle along the way to your vision:

1. Keep sight of which project you'll grant top priority, and give it the best of your time.
2. Now number them in priority order.

3. Only turn to the next project when the first is completed fully and to your ability.

How would it change your efficiency if you could think of these as "Projects 1, 2, 3," etc. and complete one at a time?

To put this strategy into place, jot down a quick list of all of the projects you have going right now. Tackle one at a time without any divergence--this is easier said than done! But this is a way to take back control over your time, and you'll see a difference in the way you are able maintain focus.

The opinions expressed here by Inc.com columnists are their own, not those of Inc.com.

PUBLISHED ON: OCT 15, 2015

Joelle K. Jay, Ph. D., is an executive coach specializing in leadership development. She strategizes with business leaders to enhance their performance and maximize business results. Her clients include presidents, vice presidents, and C-level executives in Fortune 500 companies such as Microsoft, Google, and Adobe. She is the author of *The Inner Edge: The 10 Practices of Personal Leadership*. For a free summary, go to www.TheInnerEdge.com or email Info@TheInnerEdge.com.