



When Planning Can Be Counter-Productive

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Planning and rituals can help you, but if you over plan you can stress yourself out.

As humans, we need to have a degree of flexibility and spontaneity in what we do. Think of a time when you had to work to a tight and unforgiving plan. As Helmuth von Moltke the Elder (chief of staff of the Prussian Army for thirty years in the nineteenth century) said, “*No plan survives first contact with the enemy*” – we find that if we try to stick too tightly to a plan our rigidity will undermine our efforts and ability to achieve the desired results.

Six Symptoms of When You Are Over Planning

1. ***You plan a lot and achieve little*** – here you spend considerable time planning, but little or no time in implementing the plan. No matter how good your plan is, if you don't implement it then it is useless. Too often people use this as an excuse to procrastinate and avoid making a decision or taking action.
2. ***You can't deal with the unexpected*** – plans never go as expected. Rather than making a detailed plan for what you want or expect to happen, create options. Look at the alternative scenarios that might arise and consider what you might do. Develop your ability to improvise.
3. ***Fear of change*** – people often fear change and tend to want to stay with the status quo. The reality is that we are experiencing accelerating change, and if we don't look to engage with changing ourselves then we will find change being foisted on us. If you engage change you have some influence over what can and will happen, if you do nothing you surrender any influence you may have and have to take what happens to you.
4. ***You obsess with minor details*** – also known as “analysis paralysis”, this results in the considerable effort being spent on the smallest of details. While an understanding is required, if you obsess over details needlessly you waste time and effort and miss the opportunity to see the bigger picture and to take action to capitalize on opportunities.



5. ***You abandon projects*** – here you give up on projects as they didn't work or go to plan. If you give up every time you hit a problem or a barrier you will never improve or grow. Rather you need to learn from what has not gone right and adapt your plan so that you achieve the results you are looking for given your situation.
6. ***You live in the future*** – looking ahead is one thing when driving but trying to drive the car from the position of where you will be in five minutes won't work. You need to be aware of and act in the present. It is only in the present that you make decisions and take action which drives results. Living in the future stops you from doing this.

The best way to reap the benefits of planning is to take a more relaxed approach and to understand the role spontaneity should play in your plans. Here's how:

- **Be intentional but flexible.** Decide in advance where you want to end up but accept that your route may change along the way.
- **Redefine a 100% score.** For most people, a great day is when they accomplish 60–70% of their goals. Think about a “perfect” day as one where you made the best choices possible, not one where you finished everything.
- **Don't think of your plans as a test.** If your self-worth depends on how accurately you implement your plans, you're on shaky ground. Life is meant to be lived, not just “done.”

So be flexible in not only how you plan, but in how you approach planning. A plan is a guide to the future, not a set route. Expect the unexpected, and use the unexpected as an opportunity to improve your plan because no plan is ever perfect. In doing this, learn from what goes well and what goes wrong; look at what you can do, not what you will do – action and results occur in the 'now', not in the 'when'.