

Minor tasks and major decisions: Set a deadline

Written by Julie Desmond
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Over twelve weeks, my friend Robin is journeying through six rounds of chemotherapy. She knows clearly the day and date of that last treatment. She knows what percentage is completed and how many treatments remain. And she understands her responsibility in the process; one bad cold can throw that deadline out the window if it delays a scheduled treatment.

Jason's unemployment ends exactly twenty six weeks after it began. That end date is emblazoned on his mind. By then, Jason wants to be sitting behind a computer somewhere, earning a paycheck. He knows without thinking about it exactly how much time remains and what he needs to accomplish before that deadline.

Robin and Jason are living with deadlines that were created for them and that they accept because not doing so can have dire consequences. Even if life, death and livelihood are not on the line, by setting deadlines in all areas of life people can accomplish more and become powerful decision makers.

Little things really add up. Deadlines should always be applied to minor tasks, and the to-do list set up in order of date due. End-of-day is a legitimate cutoff. By saying, I can't leave until I make this call, you create urgency and get the call out of the way. Tasks that can wait will fall on tomorrow's list, or next week's. More pressing items then rise to the top and get your attention. Amazing how quickly deadlines can de-clutter a to-do list.

Deadlines drive better decisions, too. On big choices (a car or home purchase, a new job, quitting a job, getting engaged), name a Decision Date. This is the date on which you will commit to one selection. Knowing you do not have to lock in yet, you are free to not decide. You are free to research, to hear others' opinions, and to waver. You might think you have decided. You can live with the choice and if, after a day or so, you do a 180, you have time to live with a different choice. Where will you attend school? Which team will you sign for? If anyone asks, you can comfortably answer, I haven't decided... yet.

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