

TAKE BACK

YOUR

TIME

Identify Your Priorities,
Decrease Stress,
and Increase Productivity

MORGAN TYREE



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Morgan Tyree, *Take Back Your Time*
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*To my home team,
David, Ainsley, Connor, and Berkley,
time with you is the best time of all.*

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Introduction

The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once.

Albert Einstein

Are you blazing the corporate trail, feeling like you can't keep pace with the demands of both your career and your life? Are you attempting to balance home and work while also serving as an unpaid Uber driver for your children? Are you settling into a new season as an empty nester or a recent retiree, realizing you have more time than you ever dreamed of yet unsure how to best utilize this newfound freedom?

No matter your season, no matter your walk of life, no matter what time is requiring of you—this book is for you! If your desire is to *maximize time* and *minimize stress*, you are in the right place. Within the pages of this book, through stories and simple tools, you'll learn how to make successful time management your reality. It's time to take back your time!

Take Back Your Time was born from my own personal and profound experiences of living through five unique seasons. When I refer to seasons, I am referring not to the seasons of the calendar year but to the various and significant chapters of my life: from working full-time as a businesswoman, to being a stay-at-home mom (three kids in five years—hello stress!), to homeschooling my three elementary-age children, to living abroad, and most recently to working as an entrepreneur and navigating the ever-changing road of parenting teenagers.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

In each of these seasons, I have experienced in a variety of ways the crushing reality of how complicated it can be to manage time well. Additionally, as a professional organizer, I observe firsthand the daily struggles my clients experience as they attempt to organize, plan, and schedule their time.

Time management can seem like a complicated concept, which it is and it isn't. Time management's nickname is *choices*. And how you choose to spend your time is a reflection of your priorities. Your choices are the fabric of your life. The way you carefully or haphazardly navigate your daily decisions will, intentionally or unintentionally, ultimately define your life. What you do within your seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years will determine your ability to accomplish your goals, realize your dreams, and live out your purpose. Bottom line, how you approach your choices is the deciding factor between your days being either peace-filled or panic-filled.

The good news? Although it may not be easy, it is simple to live simply. Living simply requires you to put bookends around your

commitments. It necessitates flexibility with the ebb and flow that life brings while also remaining steadfast and purposeful.

Take Back Your Time is filled with easy time-management tips to help guide you as you embrace your seasons of life. You'll learn how to implement three distinct time zones into your schedule and how to coordinate your life activities and tasks with these zones. I promise that these simple, translatable tools will help you to experience less hustle and more harmony.

And, trust me, I *know* hustle.

I've been "that mom." The mom who didn't know the name of her son's fourth-grade teacher—a month before the school year ended. The mom whose kitchen sink was usually stacked way too high with sticky and smelly dishes because everyone in my house always wants to eat. And unfortunately, I still have the tendency to think that I can cram eight hours of work, projects, or you name it into a four-hour time slot, which is the best way to induce an overwhelming sense of hurry.

Having experienced more hustle than I'd like to admit, I've learned that the mode of full throttle usually doesn't work. Sure, I find ways to get things done. I'll even show up on time or check off a box or two. But those hurried experiences tend to lack meaning, because I'm moving way too fast to enjoy or savor the moments. Activities become more of a blur than a blessing. Whereas, when I commit to remaining attentive to my specific purpose, in my current season, insisting that intentionality remain the heartbeat of my schedule, I'm able to realize more harmony and less hustle.

Time is always with you, walking alongside you on your journey and very much a part of your every experience. Whether in the mundane moments, the cherished memories, the obligatory

daily duties, or the unwelcome trials—*your time is a responsibility, a privilege, and a gift.*

My hope and prayer is that you will find comfort, inspiration, and encouragement for how to organize your time well and live your most meaningful life.

Let's seek more harmony together, one day at a time.

1

YOUR TIME

Steering Your Direction

Lack of direction, not lack of time, is the problem. We all have twenty-four-hour days.

Zig Ziglar

When we think about time management, we tend to think that the problem is we just don't have *enough* time. That is not the problem; it is a symptom of a different issue. The issue has much more to do with whether we are facing in the right direction as it relates to how we manage the time we have.

The day my husband came home and told me he wanted to put in for an overseas assignment for work, I was not thrilled—even though I'm the type of person who likes adventure and definitely prefers to go, see, and do. But his request to uproot our family of five to a foreign country for a minimum of three years seemed a

bit, shall we say, disruptive. I suggested we might start by taking a couple's trip to Europe to, you know, sort of test the waters, as I had never even been outside of North America. My stalling suggestion didn't interest him in the least. Nor did my idea of considering a move to another state for his work.

"California has a nice climate. Maybe we could have a pool or a Tuscan-styled home?" Nope. He passionately desired a change, both personally and professionally, and ultimately, I was convicted to support my husband and faithfully trust in God's timing, planning, and direction.

So, yes, I said yes. A bit reluctantly, but I meant it, and it was a yes from me.

After almost a year, David was selected, and he was over the moon! I, on the other hand, was unsure, but I welcomed the news and set about working through all the logistics of preparing for an overseas move for a family of five and a cat. Talk about details, and I *love* details! I was optimistic that our new adventure would be an opportunity of a lifetime. I embraced our temporary (three-year) relocation with a positive attitude and even started to feel myself getting excited about our pending major life change.

Nine months later we shipped our car and boarded a plane in Portland, Oregon, on a dark, cold, January morning. We traveled for over twenty-four hours with twenty-plus oversized bags and our cat in tow to Lisbon, Portugal. The adventure began.

I remember our arrival and first few days and weeks like they were yesterday. We were shuttled to a hotel with an oceanfront view where we stayed for over two months. If you've never lived in a hotel for two months with three grade-school-age children (thankfully the cat was not with us for this stint), living out of suitcases while attending to regular life (like packing daily lunches for school), I don't recommend it. It was the longest

and quite possibly the hardest two months of my life. Thankfully, our kids were absolute troopers and rolled through the transition with ease.

As soon as we had unpacked our suitcases, bought groceries, and purchased new phone plans, David began work in his new office and the kids jumped into their school year midway.

Then there was me—bound to our hotel with no car (which would take eight weeks to arrive) and living in a foreign country. The excitement wasn't sinking in—at all. I wish I could say that things got better for me. In some ways they did, but in many ways our three and a half years in Portugal felt somewhat like my time in a barren, dry desert, and yet we were five minutes from the beautiful ocean.

*Teach us to number our
days, that we may gain
a heart of wisdom.*

Psalm 90:12

This season in my life rocked my world.

It was the first time that almost every piece of my purpose or what fell under my umbrella of responsibility was stripped away from me. I still had a purpose in mothering and in my marriage, but beyond that, so much of my former life had disappeared. In Oregon, I had been teaching fitness classes, homeschooling the kids, volunteering, and managing (organizing, decorating, and running) our humble abode. My life was packed with purpose. My schedule was full, my time was allocated to my different priorities, and my direction was crystal clear.

When we settled into our new life in Portugal, I was sending my children off to school for a full eight hours a day and we were renting a home that didn't provide me the freedom to renovate and redesign (two of my passions). Instead, all I could do was creatively rearrange furniture and hang pictures to try to create some semblance of our style and make our rental house feel more

like home. I desperately pursued finding part-time work—at the local health clubs, my husband’s office, my children’s school—but nothing fit or worked out for me. It was the first time in my life when one door after another kept slamming shut in my face, and I hit an all-time low. Furthermore, relocating over five thousand miles away from home revealed several cracks in our marriage that we had not previously seen. It seemed *maybe* part of God’s plan was to strip away some of the fullness (some might call it busyness; more on this later) from my life to expose areas in our marriage that desperately needed attention and repair.

As I peeled back my layers of sadness, I realized that what was so incredibly hard for me in this season was that I lacked clear direction and purpose. I had all the time in the world, and yet I didn’t have a productive way to use any of it. Sure, lunches and tennis lessons were fun, but I personally needed much, much more. I had not entered into our overseas season needing a break from the life I had already established.

In time, I was able to find my bearings on the map of my life and find my direction. I became intentional about setting goals for myself, and I began writing, blogging, and consulting as a personal trainer. More importantly, David and I worked very hard on our marriage, and our time in Portugal became the launching pad for a stronger and healthier relationship. We needed this extra time God had provided as a gift to invest in our relationship. We just had to open it.

Embracing Your Season

The main takeaway from my season of life in Portugal, other than my newfound love for octopus and espresso, was that when it

comes to time management, you must first embrace your current season. When you welcome your current season and marry it to your purposes, you are able to make deliberate choices surrounding your commitments. Knowing which direction to steer is vital to knowing your next steps.

Once I realized my purposes for my season in Portugal—working on my marriage, working as a personal trainer, serving through our church, and even running a marathon (one of my life goals)—I was more successful with my time management. Before identifying my specific purposes for this season, I was lacking direction, intention, and motivation. Because of this lack of purpose, I was unable to fully embrace it. But after defining my purposes for my season, things slowly fell into place and I no longer felt as if I had all of this time to fill and no way to fill it.

From this experience, I was reminded that each season provides new and different opportunities and that some seasons are more about being and waiting than doing and performing. I also learned a valuable lesson: having *too much* time can be just as challenging as having *too little* time.

With different seasons of life come different opportunities and obligations. Recognizing your current season of life is essential to knowing how to intentionally orchestrate your time. Embracing your season with a heavy dose of realism and optimism will equip you to be thoughtful and deliberate as you manage your time.

In chapter 2 you will work to discover your current three to five purposes. Your purposes can and will look different from season to season, and your number of purposes are whatever number is right for you. There really are no other rules.

Your current season may be one of growing, pruning, resting, or waiting. Whatever your season—claim it as yours. This is your time! Today is your day.

Clearing Your Clutter

While we may think we don't have enough time, the one thing we all have enough of is—stuff!

Peter Walsh, the professional organizer from TLC's hit show *Clean Sweep*, shared the following:

Every single person I have met tells me not only about their own clutter problem, but the clutter problems of a family member, or those of a friend. Nobody seems immune. The stories are not dissimilar—papers and magazines run amok, garages overflow with unopened boxes, kids' toys fill rooms, and closets are so stuffed that it looks like the clothing department of a major retailer is having a fire sale. The epidemic of clutter, the seeming inability to get organized, and the sense that “the stuff” is taking over affects us all.¹

Having too much stuff affects our time. Clutter is at the core of each and every one of our time-management challenges. Clutter is any single thing that is crowding and limiting us from moving forward positively in our life. It not only robs us of time but is also a distraction and a drain. *We are spending time managing our stuff rather than managing our time.*

Consider this. The average home in America has roughly three hundred thousand items in it—from plates, to pillows, to pictures.² The number of storage units is on the rise across the country, because consumers are continuing to buy, buy, buy and store, store, store. In fact, there are 88.6 square miles of self-storage facilities in America, almost three times the size of Manhattan, New York!³

Why do we have so much clutter? One reason is because we are inundated with decisions almost every second of every day.

There is such a thing as decision fatigue, and it often leads to paralysis by analysis. The upside of this challenge is that we have so many wonderful choices to choose from. The downside is that we are constantly bombarded with tiny decisions throughout the day. Too many choices result in the acquisition of too much clutter.

A second reason we have so much clutter is twofold: shopping is more convenient than ever, and items are more affordable than ever. It's easy to get a good deal almost anywhere we shop. I am completely guilty of this deal-hunting mentality, because I too like a good deal. Yes, Target one-dollar section, Costco bulk items, and Amazon one-click shopping—I'm talking about you!

These days, it's easy to accumulate more in less time. We can have something delivered to our doorstep in the blink of only two days—thank you, Amazon! We no longer have to trudge to the store to hunt for deals; the deals are coming to us. But are they *good* deals?

Here's the issue. Clutter is not just physical; there can also be mental and emotional clutter, and they are just as difficult to manage as physical clutter. I'm guessing you, like me, are probably weighed down by physical, mental, or emotional clutter—or maybe a combination of all three. One of the best things to do to rein in the burden of clutter and lighten our load is to clear as much of the clutter out of our life as possible.

Having excess clutter makes it hard to know where to start. How can we know what direction to steer if we don't even know where to begin?

To help make the most of your time, I want you to consider which forms of clutter are most negatively impacting your ability to manage your time. Honestly and gently assessing between

the essentials and the nonessentials in your life will help you to create the room necessary for your priorities.

It's time to clear the clutter that is weighing you down. Use the questions in the next three sections to dig deeper into how clutter is affecting your time and your life season.

Physical Clutter

I often find that our storage areas become our catchall spots, and I find myself feeling stressed whenever I have to walk through these areas or search for something. As you look around your home—possibly all three hundred thousand items (more or less)—look for patterns of clutter that are negatively impacting your time. Identify those things that are just taking up space, then answer the following questions:

- *When was the last time you actually used _____ (fill in the blank)?* If you have a hard time answering this question, you may have answered your decluttering question right off the bat! In general, don't keep things that you don't use at least once a year.
- *Where will you really use this "someday"?* Often you hold on to something because you think you'll need it someday. Ask yourself honestly if you will *really* use this item in the future. If the answer is no, don't keep it.
- *What is the cost of your time to keep this item?* Every single item you own requires something from you. Question if the value of keeping the item exceeds the cost of keeping it. Consider all the demands that your physical things (storage, maintenance, etc.) require of you.

Mental Clutter

I regularly struggle with debilitating migraines, so I know all too well how mental clutter can increase stress. I intentionally work to minimize how much time I spend worrying and fretting about my life, whether it's mom guilt or work demands. It definitely takes effort not to worry, but the payoff—fewer migraines—is always worth it.

- *What do you tend to worry about?* If you are prone to worry and stress about life, this is naturally causing you internal chaos and adding to your mental clutter. You are likely focusing on things that are out of your control. Work to worry less and pour into those things that you *do* have some control over.
- *In what areas do you experience feelings of shame and guilt?* Be careful not to let these feelings crush and consume you. Press into them, identify them, and seek to forgive yourself (and others). Holding on to these feelings will increase your mental clutter and decrease your mental capacity.
- *When do you engage in negative self-talk?* What you tell yourself is often what you end up believing about yourself. Choosing to highlight your negative attributes rather than your positive ones is pointless. A critical spirit can keep you stuck. Determine to look at yourself through a positive lens, spotlighting your best traits.

Emotional Clutter

Parenting teenagers has added to my emotional clutter! Not that I'm complaining. (Well, maybe a little.) One of the best

ways I am able to manage the emotional clutter that comes from parenting three teenagers is to ensure that I keep my own emotional cup full. By finding ways to recharge and refill, I am able to meet the relational needs in my life and decrease the effects of emotional clutter.

- *What relationships are causing you more chaos than calm?*
Seek relationships that are mutually life-giving and avoid letting obligation be the thing that keeps you connected, especially if it is an unhealthy relationship. Work to keep your emotional tank full so you can better navigate all your relationships.
- *What memories are you hanging on to out of sentiment rather than savoring the memory for what it was—a memory?* Memories are wonderful. They produce emotional (often happy and sometimes sad) feelings from your past. While memories and reflection are important, it is more important to live in the present. Holding on to items based on emotional ties can lead to accumulation of clutter, both emotional and physical.
- *What decisions are keeping you stuck and stagnant?* You have so much information at your fingertips that decision making can feel almost impossible. You can easily spend hours trying to make just one decision. To avoid getting cemented in indecision, consider your dreams and values. Stack every decision against these two things. Then keep it simple and don't overcomplicate your decision. It's often better to decide than to stay stagnant in indecision. Sometimes the best decision is to decide—and then make that decision right!

Less clutter equals more time—more time for the things you want to realize in your life. Refuse to let clutter remain an obstacle in your life. Clearing your clutter will create space for you to more fully embrace your season of life and to keep steering in the right direction. By removing the nonessentials from your life, you will naturally create more room for the essentials.

Blending Quality and Quantity

No matter your season of life, I want to encourage you to adopt an attitude encompassing both quality and quantity, specifically when it comes to your time.

We've all heard the popular saying Quality over Quantity. Well, I'm going to agree to disagree. What we really want is quality *and* quantity. It's vital to find a balance between too much and too little, a balance in which the cost of your time is fully realized—where your time becomes a form of appreciation and your output reveals a high level of attention. If you focus on doing more, you will usually discover you are doing less.

Yes, you may be dropping off a casserole, serving in a classroom, coordinating a going-away party at work, or making time for a coffee chat. But if your heart isn't into your commitment, you won't experience the quality that should be found within the activity. However, if you intentionally put in the hours *and* invest your heart, you will reap more benefit and more likely find yourself in a win-win situation.

Time is exactly what you require to accomplish those things you need to do. When you combine quality and quantity, you will better reach your goals.

Quality refers to a high level of excellence. If something is worth doing, it should be worth doing well. A focus on quality will always help when scheduling your time. Seek a condition of quality in all of your life choices. If something is not bringing you value or is not adding quality to your life, choose to make a better choice! (Keep this in mind when you are shopping. Less is more.) Make it your mission to aim for quality. Saying a soft yes to life-giving choices and a strong no to life-draining choices will help you to increase the quality of your season of life. Remember, the word *no* can be a one-word sentence.

An example of a time in my life when I reaped the benefits of combining quality and quantity was when we had our first baby. David and I collectively and intentionally decided I would “retire” from working full-time and devote my time to raising our precious newborn. We agreed that I would continue to teach fitness classes a few times a week, but other than that, I would step down from working forty-five-plus hours a week outside of our home.

At the beginning of my pregnancy, we meticulously listed the financial priorities we wanted to accomplish before I left my job. The goals ranged from paying off our car, to buying a new appliance, to taking a holiday vacation before my February due date. We knew that without a calculated plan, it would be too tough of an adjustment financially for us to downsize to one full-time salary. Thankfully, our planning paid off (literally and figuratively), and my transition to being a stay-at-home mom went relatively smoothly. Other than the shock I experienced trying to figure out how to manage my time at home.

Before staying home, I was used to having the majority of my time managed for me via my work schedule. It required that I be at the office from eight to five, five days a week. It was a newfound

freedom to stay home and not have a fixed schedule. Caring for a newborn was time intensive, but I found the bigger struggle was learning how to use and plan my time. It was a season that was all new to me.

Before we had Ainsley, we were nicely settled into the popular DINK (double income, no kids) way of life (the good ol' days!). That season consisted of going to movies every Sunday afternoon, because we could, and dinnertime parked in front of the TV. Our dinners usually consisted of some variety of grilled meat, a side of instant rice, and some overcooked vegetables—yum. Unless it was dog-obedience school night; then we routinely got Thai takeout. Please note, our dog, a Boxer named Princess Lea, won Most Improved in the class.

On the weekends, we grocery shopped and ran errands, got all the laundry done, and cleaned the house together. When time permitted, we tiled our bathroom and kitchen floors and painted every room in our house. We had a nice rhythm to our life, and we thought we had plenty of time despite our demanding jobs.

When I moved into my new season of being a stay-at-home mom, I hadn't anticipated how much more time we would collectively have. Our quality of life immediately improved. After making the transition, we soon recognized that our previous schedules hadn't allowed enough margin to enjoy our season. Balancing two careers, home management and maintenance, pets, and life in general had been a lot to handle. But when I became more available to grocery shop during the week, get the laundry done on a single day, and have dinner ready and waiting when David returned home at the end of the day, we were able to enjoy our time together so much more. Fewer to-do items were having to be squeezed into the evenings. Our weekends also

became more relaxing and restorative. We didn't have a large home or a fancy car, nor did we go on lavish vacations, but we had a newfound and much-appreciated slower pace.

In this season, we discovered a new value we collectively shared. We both valued quality *and* quantity. We wanted to be available to one another and have increased time to experience more of our life together. We learned that—for us—less money meant more time. Less commitment meant more flexibility. Less busyness meant more fullness. Our choices resulted in our eyes opening to the value of quality and quantity. These values remain important to us to this day. We've remained intentional about having less stuff and more simplicity. We've made deliberate choices to align all commitments against the measure of quality and quantity.

I'm not saying that one parent should stay at home or that two working parents equal less quality or quantity of time. I share our experience simply to encourage you to look closely at the choices in your own life. Look at all your major decisions, from your location to your career, from your relationships to your responsibilities, and ask yourself if your choices are adding positivity or negativity to your life. Knowing how to determine the difference between the two will help you to better clarify your values and make intentional choices.

By choosing to be intentional with our life choices, both David and I have been able to achieve a better balance. We've both been able to pursue our individual purposes and have intentionally scheduled more margin into our calendars.

Just as quality matters when it comes to how you spend your time, quantity matters too! There will be times in your life seasons when the one thing you have to do is simply put in the time. But when you have a choice about how much you take on and

the quantity of time required of you, the best way to approach your decision is to count the cost of that time.

When it comes to your calendar and how many items you add to your schedule, keep in mind that with every yes to something you are saying no to something else. If you overcrowd your schedule, you will soon find yourself sacrificing your level of output, and your productivity may actually decrease. With too much on your to-do list, you won't have the ability to focus. Too little time will be assigned to each detail and duty. Commit to knowing yourself and the amount of time necessary for you to complete the various priorities in your life season. The quantity of time you pour into your life choices will reap rewards.

Quantity should remain best friends with quality for the best possible outcome. The wonderful news is that you have enough time to do exactly what you are being called to do in your current season of life. Isn't that comforting?

In some seasons, like mine in Portugal, you may find you are spending much of your time waiting, like being stuck in a traffic jam. In other seasons, like mine as a new mother, you may find you are learning how to navigate new and unfamiliar terrain. Whatever your season, God has equipped you to be exactly where you are. He knows your destiny!

Taking back your time simply means knowing where to start. Andy Stanley says it best: "Direction—not intention—determines our destination."⁴ In each and every season, seek to know your direction. Knowing where you want to go will help you to get there! Fully embrace your current season, clear the unnecessary clutter, and blend both quality and quantity. When you do, you will be able to minimize your stress and maximize your time.

TIP—TEN WAYS TO CLEAR CLUTTER

- Use gift cards immediately and entirely.
- Don't take free product samples, brochures, menus, flyers, and so on.
- Delete apps, messages, texts, photos, and contacts you no longer need.
- Don't store music or movies you no longer listen to or watch.
- Clear the clutter from your car every time you get home.
- Don't keep expired foods, beauty products, and medicines.
- Shred or toss receipts as soon as possible.
- Don't hang on to outdated and unused clothing, electronics, and toys.
- Cancel services you no longer use or benefit from.
- Don't sign up for newsletters and emails that don't bring you value.

***Take back your time—
steer your direction!***