

4 Steps Closer to Freedom – Your Juggling Act

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If I were to ask you what you are currently juggling, you would probably throw your hands up in the air and perhaps break out in a cold sweat. The question alone often raises stress levels. So let's take a look at how facing that gruesome question can actually be the first step toward reducing that stress!

1. *What are you juggling?* Take a moment to jot down a list of some general areas you're currently juggling, leaving 5 or 6 lines blank under each one. Now begin to add specific tasks in each category. While nothing has changed, you will begin to feel more in control, just by putting your "files" in order.

2. *What's expected & who's holding the gun?* We are not always able to assign our own responsibilities, and it can be very difficult to differentiate between self-appointed tasks and those expected by others. Awareness in this area is critical to moving toward informed choices.

Take a careful look at your juggling list and determine who is controlling each assignment. Have you imposed it upon yourself as necessary, or is there really someone holding a gun to your head?

I am reminded of an elderly friend who regularly missed out on gatherings of her "gal pals" because she had to scrub her kitchen. When I questioned her need to wash both floor and ceiling weekly, she would only say she'd always done it. She continued protesting until finally she admitted she didn't remember why. How many of us are likewise prisoners of our own tyranny?

3. *Is it really necessary?* To complete our examination, we need to be able to distinguish the necessity and the desirability of completing each task. We need to become accustomed to assessing new items as they arise and assigning each a designation. Take a few minutes to add a designation to each task on your list, determining and then marking each as (N)ecessary, (D)esirable, (H)abitual, or (R)ecreational.

You will probably find the majority of tasks designated as necessary on your first pass. If so, look again, and be honest with yourself. It's difficult to think that we may be struggling to handle tasks that aren't necessary at all. We tend to validate our choices by convincing ourselves the things we do with our schedules are vitally necessary. But be candid - there is no right or wrong. We're simply increasing our awareness of how we spend or waste our time, and the reasons behind the choices.

Let's look at my elderly friend again. Once she identified the tyrant in her life, she was free to determine the necessity of her stringent cleaning schedule and thereafter, she was rarely at home, having released herself from her own expectation.

4. *What's the vision?* The most important element in perfecting your juggling act is vision and accountability to it. If you can't picture it, how will you know if and when you attain it? This first step is deceptively simple, but without it, the rest of the process quickly collapses. No expectation is realistic without a clear and personal definition of success and failure.

The dictionary describes failure as "a state of inability to perform a normal function; a fracturing or giving way under stress; a falling short; deterioration, decay." But it's even easier than that! Failure is simply an attempt that did not meet all the specified qualifications. It is not only a step closer to realization of the vision, but often presents a new and better vision. Many of the wildly successful inventions emerged from what didn't work along the road to some long forgotten

vision. Chocolate chip cookies, Coca Cola, Post-it Notes, Scotchgard, X-rays, and even the worldwide web are notable examples.

Take a few moments and define what failure at your juggling act would look like, outward appearances – a personal portrait of someone who has not achieved it. Perhaps this reveals a snapshot of your life as you currently perceive it. For maximum revelation, don't consider your answer too carefully. Then, what does failure at the juggling act feel like, the invisible elements, sleeplessness, nervousness, irritability, etc.

Webster defines success as, "favorable or desired outcome, accomplishment, achievement, attainment, triumph, or victory." But success is also very personal, and must be defined personally, and specific to the circumstances.

Take a few minutes to define the elements of success for your juggling act. How would you appear to those around you if you were juggling successfully? Paint a very clear picture of a person who has achieved it. Then ask yourself how it feels to be successfully maintaining your rhythm, the invisible elements, serenity, sleep, inner confidence. It's important to capture your genuine feelings, so don't work it out mentally.

Whatever our definition of success and failure, we are all too ready to embrace anything less than perfection and call it quits. That attitude rarely succeeds at anything. If we are to recognize success when it arrives, we must change our perceptions of failure. Experience, which always includes failures of one sort or another, plus an attitude of perseverance, will eventually lead to solid, lasting success.

If you will give attention to each of these questions and be candid in your answers, you will be well positioned to move forward, making the kind of decisions about your time and talents that will free you to have a greater impact on your surroundings. Soon you will be ready to take your juggling act on the road!

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