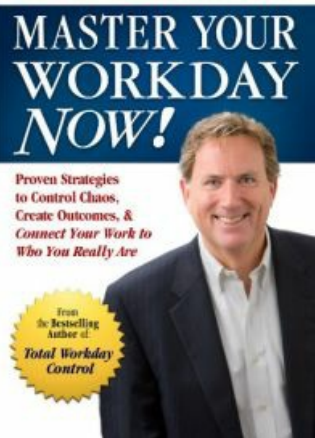


Michael Linenberger



Book Master Your Workday Now!

Proven Strategies to Control Chaos, Create Outcomes, & Connect Your Work to Who You Really Are

Michael Linenberger
New Academy Publishing, 2010
Listen now

- play
- pause

00:00
00:00

Recommendation

If, like many people, you feel pushed, frenzied, harried and crazed, project management expert Michael Linenberger is trying to help. He applies his logical engineering background to examining how the typical workday actually functions. He offers a multilayered method for getting a better handle on your day by organizing your tasks, activities and goals more efficiently and precisely. The list-making part of the book is perhaps more concrete and less subjective than subsequent sections on defining your mission and purpose, and aligning your life and your work. Linenberger’s clear goal is to provide an entire package that will help people engage in productive self-discovery, so they can achieve work-life balance and career satisfaction. However, some of his processes seem both old school and a bit complex. Still, *BooksInShort* recommends his very empathetic manual, particularly to those who are new to time management and personal goal setting.

Take-Aways

- Most people have too many tasks and not enough time to do them.
- To organize your work, list your most pressing chores as “Now Tasks.”
- Split this list into “Critical Now” jobs, which need attention today, and no more than 20 “Opportunity Now” tasks to complete over the next 10 days or so.
- Catalog lesser or longer-term priorities on a second list labeled “Over the Horizon.”
- To avoid interruptions, check your e-mail only sparingly during the day.
- Create “Now Goals” that combine your idealized “Vision Goals” with your tangible “Target Goals.” Read them each morning and evening so they continue to be relevant.
- To make your goals inspirational, visualize their results in the context of your career.
- Try to find happiness in your current role. Happy workers advance.
- To attain fulfillment, use experience and self-discovery to determine your “life’s work,” “life’s mission” and permanent, positive, transcendent purpose.
- Your job will satisfy you more if you are engaged in your life’s work, your ideal professional activity – at least for now.

Summary

“Controlling Your Workday Now”

Is your work out of control? Do you have too many chores and interruptions, and not enough hours in the day? The “Workday Now” holistic method can help you set priorities and get a handle on your work and your life. This philosophical approach to managing your job, ambitions and career path uses a task list that covers a

specific length of time: the present plus about a week in the future. This is your “power period” or “Workday Now Horizon.” Manage it efficiently to enhance your productivity and personal satisfaction. Then, you will be in control.

“Most people describe their workday as a jumble of too much craziness and too little accomplishment.”

You can set up the Workday Now method in Microsoft Outlook (Windows version only), beginning with using the Outlook Task tool. You can also set up Workday Now in most word processing programs or in Excel, as well as in MindManager, a brainstorming program. More simply, just putting pen to paper is also an effective way to construct your Workday Now program lists. This will enable you to add these lists to your calendar or planning book.

Creating Your Priority Lists

To begin, write a to-do list of your most pressing chores and responsibilities. Label it “Now Tasks.” Arrange these items in two sections: “Critical Now” (today’s chores only) and “Opportunity Now” (work to complete this week or next). Review your Now Tasks daily to stay on top of your priorities. Don’t overload the Critical Now section. Save it for today’s work only, the chores you would stay late at the office to complete. List your Opportunity Now tasks with deadlines if applicable, but keep the Opportunity Now list to no more than 20 items.

“Time-management training has not helped the out-of-control workday.”

Put lower-priority tasks on a second page labeled “Over the Horizon.” Review it weekly, putting its tasks “out of mind” for the present. If your Opportunity Now list exceeds 20 entries, put the lower-priority tasks in the Over the Horizon section. If you like, add an optional “Significant Outcomes” section to remind you of the “major accomplishments or deliverables” you want to attain this week. In effect, this precedes the Critical Now section and gives it a framework.

“Reasonable urgency can be a management tool, even a self-management tool.”

This system alerts you to crucial, immediate work. The average “Workday Now Horizon” is about a week and a half, though it can vary from one week to two weeks. Any work beyond this “threshold of work concern” will seem less stressful because you can delay it for a time. To further reduce stress, restrict the number of tasks you try to do in your Workday Now time span. Only list tasks you can really accomplish in this timeframe. Rank crucial jobs on a one-to-nine scale, with nine as the most important. Tackle them in order. Control the most pressing matters on your Critical Now and Opportunity Now priority lists by knocking off specific action items one by one. Label each item with the action you will carry out: “do,” “call,” “write,” and so on.

“Once work reaches a certain volume, a simple ‘do the important tasks first’ approach will stop working. What often happens is you end up with 40 to 140 items.”

To manage your work tasks more selectively, create “urgency zones” within your Critical Now and Opportunity Now lists. Continue to move less immediate tasks to the Over the Horizon list. Split Over the Horizon into “Defer-to-Do” tasks, for action later, and “Defer-to-Review” tasks, to look at again during an “extended review cycle.” This is the place to note items you want to re-examine monthly, every three months or every six months.

Managing E-Mail

When you get a work request via e-mail, add it to your orderly task lists as you would any other job. To handle e-mail, set up a bulk filing system, and retrieve what you want by using “full-text search.” Avoid filing e-mails by topic. Sounds that alert you to the arrival of every e-mail only interfere with your workflow. Turn the alert off and check your e-mail only once every few hours.

Setting Overall Goals

To master your work and your life, you must create results and focus on tasks with significant long-term impact. This involves setting and meeting “Now Goals.” While continuing to control your workday, you also want to move beyond time management and embrace creative accomplishments. That requires moving forward, not just tending to daily chores. Of course, your goals must be viable. You can’t operate based on “paper goals.” Now Goals encompass and balance two kinds of objectives: “Vision Goals” and “Target Goals.”

Vision Goals

To develop Vision Goals, create an ideal picture in your mind of the best objectives you could pursue. This gives you a way to own your purpose. Vision requires depicting the results you want and letting them inspire you to act. Vision Goals offer you the opportunity to “transcend the status quo.” To create your Vision Goals, explain why you want the outcomes you have in mind. Write a Vision Goals statement that is brief enough for a quick daily review. Include “descriptive” text that illustrates a vivid picture of your goals. Add “emotive” content that explains what your goals are and, for resonance, describe why they matter so deeply. Create a positive statement confirming your belief that you can accomplish your vision. Write it in the present tense. Do not say, “I will get the department head job.” Instead, state, “I have the department head job.”

“Most tasks we write down have a very short half-life – their importance decays quickly.”

A typical Vision Goal for a salesperson might read like this: “My sales have increased substantially. It feels great to be exceeding my monthly targets. I can now relax and enjoy the conversations I have with my clients, knowing I am set and every sale I make is extra. What a fantastic experience it is to be ahead of the game, month after month!”

Target Goals

To move from vision to reality, your goals must be executable and not idealized. Set highly specific, actionable objectives. Often, expressing Target Goals as a numeric quest is helpful. For instance, you might aim for \$50,000 worth of sales. While Vision Goals are creative, Target Goals require concretely managing your time and your actions.

“Goals are usually achieved using a creative process, not a control process.”

Many people buy into self-restraining ideas that limit their goals and hold back their achievements. Do not make this mistake. Create ambitious goals. Challenge yourself. You don’t want to add stress to your life, but a little tension is productive and can spur you along the way. Therefore, set “stretch” goals. A variety of established techniques, including neuro-linguistic programming, can help you conquer any fears that are holding you back from pursuing your highest ambitions. One method is to engage in an internal dialogue about your more daunting goals. State each goal and then argue against the objections that crop up in your thoughts.

Vision Goals plus Target Goals Equal Now Goals

Study your Vision Goals and Target Goals daily. Together, they form the Now Goals you are ready to pursue actively.

“For most of us, goals sit beyond the Now Horizon. We set them and forget them. We set them because we feel we are supposed to, but then they don’t occupy our active interest.”

Visualize the outcome of attaining your goals as if you have already achieved them. This will program your mind to get the work done. Spend from 30 seconds to a few minutes each day on “positive visualization” of your goals. This intense focus and attention will spur you to undertake “Immediate Now” (or “I-Now”) goal-fulfilling steps. The mental process of activating your ambitions can invigorate “your subconscious thoughts, which then guide your behavior.” Do not ignore this vital, even enjoyable, “goal spinning” step. If you do it right, you should see results within “20 to 30 days.”

“Workplace goals [often are] set for what seem like entirely wrong reasons. Often they are set because a required performance review process involves some blanks to fill in on a form.”

To select the first actions to take toward fulfilling your Now Goals, brainstorm the possibilities using “mind mapping.” Write a goal in the middle of a sheet of paper (or type it into your computer using MindManager). Connect the goal to all the relevant “topic” and “subtopic” areas to set up a graphic that shows your Now Goals in the context of actions you can undertake.

“Busy task time is not the time to try to manage goals.”

For example, if your goal is to design a beautiful book, your goal statement might be: “I have a book cover...design that works great visually and is easy to read.” Your action steps might be: “find [a] designer, create cover mockups, find three interior designs” to test with potential readers. Schedule these actions as a series of “dated milestones.” Move ahead as soon as you develop your goals. Should you act daily? That’s up to you. If an everyday schedule works for you, that’s great, but don’t force yourself arbitrarily to manufacture something to do each day.

Uniting Your Work and Your Purpose

Besides controlling your workday, you also want to connect to your job meaningfully so that it satisfies you. Picture two circles. You are one of them and the other one is your career. For most people, these circles do not correlate. Your goal is to connect them in a rewarding way by learning to feel passionate about what you do. To achieve a sense of passion, ask yourself some pivotal questions, such as, why do you work? What do you enjoy about it? Such examination is important in making your job satisfying. Try to form a more comprehensive, visionary picture of your job in the context of your career. See it as “larger than yourself” by finding its meaning and purpose. This tactic fits seamlessly with the Workday Now philosophy.

“The subconscious mind does a fantastic job of synthesizing our experiences, even ones we do not notice, and then feeding subtle information back to the surface mind when needed in real time.”

Strive to be happy in your current job rather than fantasizing about happiness in some imaginary future role. Being content now does not preclude having better jobs in the future; it enables you to attain them, because happy workers are the ones who advance. Unhappy employees stay mired in situations they find distressing. You can be pleased in your current job and still move ahead in your career and fulfill a larger purpose in life. For most people, simply earning more money is not a larger purpose or a productive vision. To find your greater purpose, learn to trust your internal guidance mechanisms. You want to feel as if you are “in the flow” when you work, moving confidently and effortlessly toward achievement and satisfaction. Such a connection as this will help you find a more encompassing purpose. If you enhance your ongoing, immediate experiences, it will make each workday more productive.

“Normally, when first setting a goal...go beyond your comfort zone but not too far.”

Connect with yourself by seeking balance in your life. Exercise. Take a yoga class. Meditate. Sleep well. Spend more time with your family. Try to become more intuitive (a skill that training can enhance). Spend some valuable “think-time” behind closed doors. Don’t focus on anything in particular; let your mind wander. To get in touch with yourself, take a walk in a natural setting.

“Focusing your attention most productively is your real challenge.”

You will be most contented on the job if you feel as if you are engaged in “your life’s work,” that is, if you are in the professional role that is ideal for you. This does not have to be some high-paying, prestigious job. A teenage girl working in an ice-cream store may love preparing sundaes. Perhaps she is engaged in her life’s work – at least for now. To determine your life’s work, try:

1. **Identifying the elements of the work you want to do** – List the professional activities and projects that have brought you joy in the past. Catalog your

primary career skills and strengths. Let intuition point you in the right direction. Be flexible in your thinking.

2. **“Writing a vision statement”** – Use vivid, positive, enthusiastic language for this declaration. Stay in the present tense. You can include Target Goals in this statement.
3. **Actualizing your vision** – Your vision statement is meaningless if it doesn’t affect and inform your work in the present. Read it when you wake up and before you go to sleep.

You will feel as if your life has true meaning when you pursue your “Personal Life Mission” – fulfilling the purpose you are on earth to accomplish. A Personal Life Mission might be, “Helping [others] achieve their life’s goals through their work.” Such a mission is:

- **“Permanent”** – It is as much a part of you as your soul. It began when you did.
- **“Positive”** – A negative personal life mission is an oxymoron.
- **“General”** – It transcends your work.
- **“Discovered through experience”** – You identify it via learning and self-examination.

If you connect with yourself in a meaningful way and develop reliable intuition, you can use your quest for your Personal Life Mission to guide your career choices and elevate your work, thus making your job and your life more fulfilling.

About the Author

Michael Linenberger is a project management expert who helps organizations work more efficiently. He previously headed the U.S. Peace Corps’ Information Technology Department.
