

## Working with Time

After a successful barn-raising, you should be able to finish your flowchart, with every major branch of action developed right down to first steps. You don't actually have to write all your first steps into the chart—you'll probably have too many to squeeze them all in. Just complete the basic structure of your chart.

Then make a separate list of your first steps, checking them off as you get them done and adding new ones.

Like Jeannette:

### FIRST STEPS

call mechanic  
call A  
call friends  
look  
network  
get maps

### GOAL

publisher accepts  
book

or Mary:

## FIRST STEPS

notes  
research corporations  
call B  
study for exams  
call about review course

## GOAL

enter medical  
school

The purpose of a flow chart isn't to map out every tiny detail of your plan. We're going to be using other tools for that, like a pocket calendar. The flow chart is to guide you so that you'll always know what *phase* of your plan you're in, and exactly what you have to get accomplished at that phase before you can move on to the next.

Flow charts are as individual as fingerprints: no two are alike. Try drawing your own on a sheet of blank paper. Once you've done that, you've turned your dream into a *structure*: a logical sequence of actions designed to lead you step by step to your goal. But that structure hasn't begun to exist in reality yet. A flow chart is like an architect's blueprint: it's a lot more specific than a mental image of your dream house, but it still isn't the house—it's only a guide for building a house. To turn it into a reality you can live in, you've got to start building. And the only way to build a dream is brick by brick, action by action, day by day, *in real time*. So our next task is *to map your flow chart onto time*.

That will mean, first of all, setting a target date: an actual day, like January 1, 1981, by which you'd like to have your goal and think you might be able to get it. Then you will mark a wall calendar with target dates for each major phase or step in your plan, corresponding to each circle on your flow chart, so you have a rough schedule to measure your progress against. And finally, you'll start assigning the small specific actions that really make it all happen to specific days in your pocket calendar, so that they actually get done, one by one.

Before you can start working with time, however, you've got to have the time to work with. If you think you don't, there is a very simple way to solve that problem. Just get into action. Start fitting little bits of your goal-work into your life however you can. And it's like being in love: the time will find itself.

Whenever people complain to me that they can't afford to do what they love full time, I tell them, "Start doing it in your spare time and watch what happens." Ellen, an elementary-school teacher on a small salary, dreamed—and despaired—of having her own horse ranch. I told her that as a first target she ought to have a horse to come home to evenings and weekends. She thought horses were terribly expensive because every birthday of her childhood she had asked her mother for one and her mother had said, "We can't afford it, dear." So I suggested she schedule some first steps of the "go-out-and-find-out" variety. To her astonishment, she found a wonderful, gentle 11-year-old bay gelding for all of \$150! She stabled him in her tiny backyard and paid for his feed by giving riding lessons on weekends.

Having that horse changed Ellen's life and her whole personality. She was such a joyous teacher that word spread all around her New Jersey area, and the demand for riding lessons grew to the point where she needed—and could afford—a second horse. Next year she's going to be teaching riding full time.

The same thing happened to Diane, the city planner, who started her career by going to block-association meetings in the evenings after work. And the same thing will happen to you. If your goal is to make your living by doing what you love, start doing it just for love.

Whenever someone still protests that I don't understand, she or he really has no time, I say, "Try a Hard Times session." Because "I don't have time" can be an emotional problem. It means you're scared, and keeping very busy is your way of staying safe. You'll be learning techniques for defusing that kind of fear in the next two chapters. But in the meantime, you can go ahead and start freeing blocks of time for your goal-work. The way to do that is by analyzing the way you spend your time now—and then pinpointing those time-filling, time-killing activities where the fear and pain are hiding. I call them *avoidance patterns*, and it's from them that most of your new time will come.

## PRESENT PATTERNS OF SPENDING TIME

Most of us have very little idea of how we actually spend our time—and it can be pretty hair-raising to find out. But if you think you have a time problem, I really recommend doing this next exercise if you can stand it, because *the way you spend your days is the way you spend your life*. It's right here, in the little details of your days, that you will have to make the changes if you want your life to change. And before you can change those details, you've got to take a good frank look at what they are.

Try to record, without flinching or falsifying, *what you actually do with your time* every day for a week. This is even harder than keeping track of every penny you spend to figure out where the money is going, but it can be done. Fill in this chart:

<b>PRESENT PATTERN OF TIME SPENT</b>			
	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Most people have one of two reactions to what they find out: 1) “I had no idea I was wasting so much time!” Or, 2) “What’s going to be on my gravestone is, “Good Person. S/he kept a lot of people clean, well-fed, and happy.” We will call 1) The Procrastinator, and 2) The Good Woman/Good Provider.

### *The Procrastinator*

If you have discovered that a lot of your time is going down the drain of avoidance patterns, don’t be too hard on yourself for it. Above all, *don’t make any drastic resolutions to reform*. You know perfectly well that “I’ll never watch another late movie or read *Cosmopolitan* again!” leads straight to a guilty orgy of whatever it is you’re not supposed to be doing. It’s an invitation your inner brat cannot resist. The strictest Puritans are the worst and sneakiest time-wasters, because they demand so inhumanly much of themselves that their brats are in a constant state of rebellion.

The fact is, you cannot get rid of your avoidance patterns—and you shouldn’t. You need them. You have to have some self-indulgent goodies—a few late-night movies, some time to read paperback bestsellers, drink beer, talk on the phone, or do nothing at all. The whole trick is to schedule them. That’s right, absurd as it may sound, *schedule your avoidance patterns*, so that you can look forward to them, instead of allowing yourself to fall into them whenever the impulse strikes.

Unless you are a mother with two children under the age of 3—in which case you’d better find another mother to swap afternoons with—your “Present Patterns” has probably turned up at least an hour or two a day that you habitually fill by napping . . . or watching football games or soap operas . . . or rereading the morning papers . . . or cleaning a closet or desk you already cleaned last week. It’s probably a time when you’re alone, a lull between storms of activity and demand: lunch hour at work, afternoon before the kids come home, evening after they’re in bed. That’s the ideal kind of time for working on your goal—but you need the idleness and relaxation, too.

So here’s what you do. First, pick one of those time periods and mark it off simply as *time that belongs to you*. (Note that you’re not stealing time from anything or anybody else—not yet. Right now, all you’re doing is making

official and positive something that's already true in fact.) Try to define its borders—say, from 1:30 to 3:00 P.M. in the afternoon. If you use the kind of pocket calendar that shows the hours of each day, draw a red line around those hours and label them, “*My time.*”

You don't have to set a formal block of time aside every day, unless you want to. It can be once or twice or three times a week—but try to make it the same time every day or every week, like “One-thirty to three P.M., Tuesdays and Thursdays.” That's because ritual is a terrific antidote for procrastination. Setting a definite and regular time for getting certain things done makes it much likelier that you will do them, as you well know if you pay your bills on the first of every month. I happen to think you owe yourself at least as much promptness and reliability as you owe the phone company. If you forget to pay them, they just shut your phone off. Forget yourself for long enough, and you'll shut your soul off. So you establish a regular time period that's just for you. I don't care how short it is at first.

Now, *divide that time period in half*. The first half is your time slot for doing whatever goal-work you'll schedule into each week: writing a paragraph, sketching the cat, running over to the library, making phone calls. The second half is strictly for goofing off. Promise yourself that when half your time is up, you'll drop whatever you are doing for your goal and start reading *True Romances* or watching "Columbo" with a vengeance. I promise you that you'll eventually break that promise, but never mind. It's there for as long as you need it.

That's how you start getting goal time out of “wasted” time, like gold out of dirt. And a start is all you need. Once you really get going on your goal, a lot of other things you thought you absolutely had to do are suddenly going to start taking second, third, and eighth place. Like housework, for instance.

### *The Good Woman/The Good Provider*

I've got a couple of radical statements to make about housework and other role-related “shoulds.” The first is: If you love keeping a house shining clean, cooking, and taking care of people (or mowing the lawn, washing the car, and weeding the garden), do it. Have a good time, and don't let anybody tell you that you should be doing something more Important and Creative. But if you find you're bored and overwhelmed by the *sameness* of it all,

stop. I did. And I found out that a lot of things I thought were important—like a clean floor and a full refrigerator—weren't. My friend Joe made the same discovery—just in reverse. Joe had grown up with the male myth of the Good Provider. That meant that it was a real man's responsibility to get a secure high-paying job and work long hours, so he could supply his wife and children not only with food, shelter, and clothing, but with ten-speed bikes, Florida vacations, and Airstream trailers. A man who would really rather spend long evenings at home, make jewelry in his garage, and take the kids camping in a 6-year-old Volkswagen bus was considered shiftless, self-indulgent, and an evader of responsibilities. It cost Joe a bleeding ulcer to quit driving himself in an accountant's job he hated and start keeping books at home part-time while he worked on his cabinet making and woodcarving. He discovered to his surprise that his kids felt proud when they earned the money for something they wanted, and that his wife infinitely preferred the pleasure of having him at home to the convenience of having two cars.

So my second outrageous pronouncement about housework . . . or any other paying or nonpaying job—is: If you don't love doing it, *stop*.

You're only going to live once. *You must have what you want*. So draw up a list of all the things you think you have to do. Then cross out everything you would cross out if you were going to die in six months! And then stop doing them. Your house may not run right. Your lifestyle may go through some interesting mutations. But no one is going to die, no one will get scurvy, no one's teeth will fall out—and no one is going to throw you out on the street for not being a Good Woman or a Good Provider.

Of course you need to take care of other people. It makes you feel connected, and it's rewarding to protect and nurture living things and watch them grow. But *you have no right to give away everything*. If you have two children and a husband or a wife, that's three people you need to love, but there's a very important fourth one—you. There shouldn't be any second-rate children in your house. If you treated yourself like a favorite child you would know how to help your husband learn to be nurturing and attached . . . your wife to be a person in her own right. You would help your children see you as someone who loved life, loved them, and encouraged them to love themselves.

“Selfish” people love with all their hearts. They may not take care of their loved ones from the cradle to the grave, but they do something better: they

give them the gift of self-respect and strength and freedom. Self-sacrificers make bonds of guilt. If your children look into your eyes and see delight, they've got a good world. If you're so tired and angry you can't enjoy them, what they're going to feel is, "I don't care about my Christmas present or my lunch. Why don't you ever smile?"

Just try this exercise and ask yourself how you felt about your own parents:

## OBLIGATIONS

Did you ever feel guilty about either of your parents? How do you think you would have felt if your mother or father had done a little less for you and a lot more for her/himself?

Here's how some other people answered:

John, 32 years old: "If my mother, instead of making all the beds and making sure I had my lunch, had kept coming in to me—when my bed was unmade and nothing was picked up—and telling me how excited she was about some poem she was writing, I think I'd have had the best life in the world! I think that I'd have felt so enthusiastic about her, so free to go out and do what I wanted, so happy to have some real company instead of a devoted maid who made me feel sad and guilty, that I'd have adapted to the rest."

Harriet, 45 years old: "I can think of no greater single pain in my life than knowing that my mother, 'because of us,' was less than she could have become. And I can think of no greater gift she could have given us than to have been a full, complete, and happy person—because if she had, then I would have had a much easier time finding the full and happy person within myself."

Grace, 27 years old: "My father was the martyr in my family. There were four of us kids, and he worked for years at a routine job to keep us in braces and vacations. I didn't really know what he believed or felt, except that he thought it was good to be the way he was—self-denying for other people's sake. I could never enjoy the "selfishness" he made possible for me, because he made me so ashamed of it. There's a happy ending to this story, though. After we all got out of school my father went through an incredible



transformation. He quit his job, pooled his savings with another man, and started a restaurant and jazz club. It's almost as if he was inspired by the changes in his kids' lives and values. I love him so much. I swear, I would have worked my way through college if he could only have been himself when I was growing up."

How would *you* like to have had no guilt about your mother or father?

How would you like your kids to have no guilt about you?

OK. Now let's get back to planning.

## YOUR PLANNING WALL

We've talked about finding time for yourself. Now you're also going to need a space that's all your own: one wall of one room in your apartment, house, or garage, preferably with a desk or a table in front of it. If you've got a real space problem—you share a bedroom with your mate, and you've got a small living room and kitchen and that's it—buy a cheap folding screen with which you can temporarily block off one corner of either room. Use the screen, or a moveable bulletin board, for your wall space.

That's your *planning wall* and on it you're going to put up a series of charts that will map your plan of action out *across time*—month by month, week by week, day by day—like a general mapping out both the broad strategies and the details of his campaign.

The reason for blazoning your plans across a whole wall, instead of hiding them away in a drawer or a notebook, is that you can glance up at any time and see exactly where you are in your flow chart, whether you're ahead of or behind the schedule you've set yourself, what you have to get done *this week*, what you have to do *tomorrow*. (And when you get to knock off work for a while.) When it's all right in front of your eyes, constantly updated, you won't ever get lost—and you won't be able to run away from it! This wall is going to be your conscience and your guide, your security blanket and your boss. And your planned vacation. You might as well have fun designing it.

You can cover your wall with corkboard, and put up your charts with bright-colored push pins. You can stick them on the wall with masking tape, and tear down and tape up new ones every time your plans change. Or paper a whole wall with glossy shelf paper, and scribble all over it with water-color markers that can be wiped off. Or use the side of a metal filing cabinet—or your refrigerator!—and tack up your plans with magnets. No matter how you design your wall, though, put up a picture of your personal “saint”—the person you chose in Chapter 5 to inspire you and cheer you on. (You can put up pictures of your whole imaginary “family” of winners from Chapter 3, if you want a really substantial cheering section.) You can “report back” to that imaginary friend as a way of acknowledging your own progress whenever you don’t have a real friend waiting in the wings to hear how things went.

The real meat of your planning wall begins with:

### *Your Flow Chart*

This belongs right in the center, because it’s the master plan that coordinates everything else. If you’re one of those wonderful maniacs who plans to pursue more than one goal at a time, like running for City Council and learning to play the piano, you can put up two (or more!) flow charts in different colors.

On the left-hand side of your flow chart it should say “Tomorrow.” Now you’re going to pick a *target date* and write it under your goal, over on the far right. (You might also like to draw or cut out a picture that symbolizes your goal—a published book, a well-dressed executive at her desk, a house in the country, a horse in a field—and put it up at the end of your flow chart. Some people find that it helps them keep their goal in their mind’s eye.) That date is the other end of your “bridge” of actions, and it is what makes it a solid bridge, of a measurable length, with a real destination, not a rainbow with its other end in the clouds. Of course your target date can only be a rough date. After all, we’re planning without facts. Once you get out there, a hundred things can roll in that there’s no way of predicting—from an unforeseen problem that sets you back two months to a fabulous job offer that advances you six. Life is full of chutes and ladders. Even without major surprises, you’ll almost certainly have to adjust your target date simply because you can’t know in advance how long things are going to take. For instance, you may have thought you could write a book at the rate of ten

pages a day, and then discover that you can only write ten pages a week—or vice versa. In other words, you can and probably will change this date—but *it is very important to set it anyway*. Here's why.

Anybody who's ever gotten married knows that setting the date is a declaration of serious intention—the promise that makes the goal real. Because a date is also a deadline, and you know from experience that that makes the difference between acting like you have all the time in the world and getting yourself in gear.

A 17-year-old boy was standing in line to apply for college. He turned around and discovered that standing right behind him in line was a white-haired old man.

The boy said, "Excuse me, are you . . . I mean, I don't mean to be rude, but what are you doing here?"

"Why, I'm applying for college," said the old man, smiling.

"Would you mind if I asked you how old you are?" said the boy.

"I'm seventy-four."

"But . . . don't you realize that you'll be seventy-eight by the time you graduate?"

"Son," said the old man, "I'll be seventy-eight anyway."

That's the whole point. You'll be 78 anyway. You can do a thousand fabulous things between now and then. If you get with it. And a deadline will make you do that.

If setting deadlines for yourself has never worked before, it's because you kept those dates in your head (or your pocket calendar, where you never look six months ahead). *In your head there is no time!* In your head it is always now. That's why you need a planning wall. On it, you're going to be able to see time blocked out ahead of you as clearly as a hopscotch game, with instructions for each square, each "now."

Only two words of caution about setting your target date. Don't set it so close that it's totally impossible. That's a dirty trick to play on yourself—it will only make you feel inadequate. You are not a machine. You've got to allow some time for Christmas and summer vacation, for laziness, love, and

fun. But on the other hand, don't set the date so far away that it gives you lots of slack "just to be safe." You want some pressure and urgency. This piece of work isn't less important than a term paper for your professor or a report for your boss. It is more important, because it's for you. If, after your best efforts, your target date turns out to be "unrealistic," you'll change it with no sense of failure. But if you give yourself three years to write your book, you'll never know what you could have done in one.

### *Your Goal Calendar*

A GOAL CALENDAR is a large sheet of paper divided into boxes, one box for each month between you and your target date.

It can be a six-month goal calendar:

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June
1980						

or a two-year calendar:

1980												
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
1981												

or whatever you need.

Now look at the major steps of your plan—the circles on your flow chart. Important: If your goal is something like writing a novel that doesn't have clearly defined steps—just demands a steady pace of work—invent some big steps: "Finish first draft," "Finish 100 pages," "5 chapters." You will need these landmarks, both to regulate the pace of your work so you don't hit a panic two weeks before target, and to reward you with a frequent, reachable

sense of accomplishment. Assign each of these steps a target date of its own, and write *those* deadlines into your goal calendar.

Again, you're going to be doing some fairly wild guessing. It doesn't matter. You can change every one of these dates, if necessary, as you find out what the realities are, but they are guesses you must make in order to get yourself in motion.

Your goal calendar is really what maps your flow chart onto time, giving you a tentative schedule against which you can check your pace and progress.

Jeanette—the would-be traveling photographer—really had a first target: the day of departure for her trip to Appalachia, with a fully-equipped rolling photo lab, a list of places to stay for free, and enough money for traveling expenses. When she got back from her trip, she could draw a new flow chart for the process of putting together and selling her book. So she set a target date for her departure: June 15, 1979. She chose that target date not only to allow enough time to get everything together, but so that she would be driving through Appalachia in summer, when children were out of school.

To leave on June 15 there were three things Jeannette would have to have—goals she would have to meet: equipped truck, addresses, and money. Jeannette decided to allow a good four months before departure for fixing up the old van she planned to buy—two-and-a-half months for the mechanical repair work, and six weeks for converting it into a darkroom. So the van would have to go into repairs no later than February 1. While it was being repaired, she would have time to send out a call through her network of friends for second-hand cameras, as well as for places to stay along her route—which meant, of course, that she'd also need to get her route planned out in February. She then had January to take advertising pictures for the mechanic in trade for repairs. She decided to aim for a pre-Christmas flea market on November 25 to raise the money to buy the truck. She also realized that her best chance of getting a job in a photo store would be during the pre-Christmas rush—and that a lot of film and photographic paper would probably go out of date on January 1. Jeannette marked all of these deadlines on her calendar. She had now organized the tangle of tasks on her flow chart into neat blocks of time that didn't overlap too heavily in any one month, and her calendar for the nine months between her starting point and her target date now looked like this:

call mechanic			advert. pix for mechanic	start fixing truck by 1st		outfit truck	outfit truck	
call re truck	organize flea mkt. by 25th	buy truck	try to get old film, paper, etc. after 1st		network call for camera	network call for cameras	Lab	
call friends								
start looking	look for photo store job							
call re grants				grant applications			\$	
			get maps	plan route	network call	network call	addr.	

Oct.                      Nov.                      Dec.                      Jan.                      Feb.                      Mar.                      Apr.                      May                      June  
15

For Mary, whose goal was to get into medical school, drawing a goal calendar required meeting an outside-world timetable. So Mary had to do a little research. What was the deadline for medical school applications each year? When were applicants informed about their admission? When were the MCATs given? When did review courses start?

Mary had begun working toward her goal in March 1978. A few phone calls to nearby universities quickly informed her that this semester's review courses were already under way, that the MCATs were given in June and December, and that the deadline for medical school applications was in September. Mary realized that she would have to take the review course starting in the coming fall, and that since she had to work and couldn't possibly study full time, she would probably have to take it over a time span of two semesters. She couldn't apply to medical schools until the fall of 1979, and that would make her target date for entering school the fall of 1980. Mary had a two-and-a-half-year goal calendar!

Now you can begin to see how different a flow chart is from a goal calendar—and how necessary both of them are. Your flow chart gives you the *logic* of your plan. Your goal calendar gives you the actual *timing*, accounting for reality factors like Christmas rush and summer vacation, test dates and application deadline—and just how long things are likely to take. Your flow chart works each branch of action down to first steps, things you could do tomorrow. Your goal calendar lets you know which of the first steps you *should* start doing tomorrow.

When you've completed your calendar, you've got your plan planted firmly in real time. You've defined your *first steps*—clear-cut, short-term tasks with fairly pressing deadlines. Now you can focus in on those and forget about everything further down the line for the time being. You've entrusted it all to paper; it's there, it's real, it's not going to go away. You don't have to try to carry the whole structure around in your head. Any time you need to know if you're on schedule, you can look ahead at the next deadline on your calendar. And any time you need to be reminded why you're doing what you're doing, you can just glance up at your flow chart and see exactly where today's small action fits into the context of your plan.

### *Scheduling Your First Steps*

Right now you've got your list of first steps to launch you on all the branches of your plan: places to go, people to see, numbers to call, information to look up. Your goal calendar makes it clear to you which of these first steps must take immediate priority and which can wait. What you're going to do now is tack up a list of those immediate priority steps on your planning wall—and then start scheduling them, one by one, into the days of this week, next week, and the week after that.

We're going to schedule one week at a time. Some of the steps you take may turn out to be blind alleys, and you'll have to come up with new ones to replace them. (For instance, Jeanette might call and find out the man with the broken down van has already sold it. Then she'd have to start looking for another one: asking her friends, checking classified ads in the paper, putting notices on bulletin boards, etc.) On the other hand, one step may hit the jackpot and catapult you into the next phase of your plan, making five other steps unnecessary. (Jeannette might walk into a photo store and strike up a conversation with a store manager who couldn't give her a job, but liked her

plan and was willing to donate old film and paper.) Once you get into action, each week is really going to be a whole new ball game.

### *Weekly Calendar*

You're going to put up a fresh weekly calendar each week, at your own personal Sunday night planning meeting (see p. 235) Use a week-at-a-glance calendar, or hang a whole pad of paper on your planning wall and just tear off each week as it's finished. How many of the steps on your master list you can schedule into any week depends, of course, on how much time you've been able to set aside for goal work. Jeannette had a full-time job, but she'd cleared most lunch hours, one hour two evenings a week, and Sunday afternoons. Her list of first steps read:

1. Call Ned in Susan's office about van
2. Call Abby's brother about van repairs
3. Call friends to arrange flea-market planning meeting
4. Call Tony A. for advice on grants
5. Check Yellow Pages for photo stores near my office
6. Start looking for photo-store job
7. Call Abby: report back

Obviously, after talking to Tony about grants, checking out the Yellow Pages, and having her flea-market meeting, she'll have a number of *follow-up* steps to add to her master list on Sunday night and to start scheduling on her next week's calendar.

Mary, by contrast, had an even fuller schedule of responsibilities—and only one immediate first step to schedule over the next four months: reviewing her old college science notes. Your weekly calendars may look like Mary's if your job is to make slow, steady progress toward a subgoal like researching a particular business or topic—or a goal like writing a book. (If your life is as crowded as Mary's, you may also want to schedule your relaxation time to remind yourself that you need and deserve it.)



Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
6:30 baby up →						
7:30 baby to sister's →					play	10:00 baby to sister's
9:00 work →						
↓	↓	WORK		↓	with baby	study ↓
5:30 pick up baby 8:00 baby in bed		relax	8-10 study	babysitter date	Relax	5:30 pick up baby
relax	8-10 study					Relax

The next step is very easy—and very important. You transfer the information from the weekly calendar on your planning wall into your purse or pocket calendar. *This is the step that really gets things done.*

### *Purse or Pocket Appointments Book*

This little calendar is the piece of your planning machinery that travels around with you and reminds you what you're supposed to do at lunchtime today and at 3:00 P.M. tomorrow. Most of us already use pocket calendars to remind us of business lunches, dentist appointments, birthdays, and social engagements. If you don't, I recommend starting now—you'll discover that a pocket calendar is at least as indispensable as a wristwatch. If you do use one, you know that writing something in that calendar virtually assures that you will do it. And that's because you've got an *appointment*. Not an option;

not something you may or may not do depending on whether you remember, whether you feel like it, and the weather; but something you've contracted to do at a particular time. In this case, the contract is with yourself—the most important person in your life, and the one person to whom you may never have accorded the simple respect you give your doctor or your date. But once you write a goal step in your pocket calendar, it becomes as real as a doctor's appointment. And like a doctor's appointment, unless there's a blizzard, it doesn't make much difference how you feel—when the time comes you'll do it.

This is that wonderful thing called *structure*. It has a momentum of its own, and it will keep you rolling along with it through all your ups and downs. You don't have to be solemn and military about these plans. They are an aid to help you get what you want—and they will. Even if you sometimes skip a scheduled step, you'll get many, many more of them done than if they weren't assigned to specific days in your calendar. (When you have no structure, you can just bury the whole idea the first time you get discouraged or scared.) And as you do those steps, you'll be making real progress toward your goal.

Each phone call you make, each article you read, every office or museum you visit, forges another link in the chain. Many of these steps are so small that you don't need "self-confidence" or "self-esteem" to do them. And yet they're going to give you the self-esteem of cumulative accomplishment—the only kind there really is. At the end of each day, you can note down what you did in the Actions & Feelings Journal you started keeping in Chapter 5. At the end of each week, you can look back at your weekly calendar and see how many things you've actually done. (Whether they've all worked out or not, they will have given you what you need most: the experience of goal-directed action.) And then you can check your progress against your goal calendar and see how far you've already come. If you're making more rapid progress than you anticipated, shift your deadlines forward. If you're slipping behind schedule, step up your pace-scheduling two steps a day instead of one or using Saturday afternoons as well as Sundays—or decide that your deadlines are unrealistic, and push them back.

You'll make many other changes in your planning wall. You may get a totally unexpected job offer; you may fall in love and go off on a two-month cruise to the Bahamas; you may decide to change your goal. So you'll pull down all your charts and start over. You may want to draw a new flow chart

halfway through your plan, when the details of the later stages are much clearer. What I'm giving you here isn't an absolute, it's a flexible set of skills for building large plans out of small, steady actions, *without losing sight of either the detail or the whole*. Gloria, 36, who had conceived a complex and ambitious plan to found a textile-design and learning center, had this to say about it:

“My plan seems big and I'm nervous about it, but I know there's one thing that's going to make me feel secure, and that's my planning wall. Even if there are unknowns ahead that frighten me, I'll feel fine, now that I understand how to work with these different kinds of charts. I'm a visual person in my work and it really helps me to be able to see it all in black and white.”

Speaking of the detail and the whole, there are two more items that are very handy to have on your planning wall. They frame the whole vista of time, from your very next step to the far horizon, and remind you that to make the best of your one stay on Earth, you've got to think both large and small.

### *The Next Five Years*

At the end of your Goalsearch, when we did “Five Lives,” I encouraged you to think about a larger life plan that includes all your dreams and goals. Here's where you put that life plan into a real time frame. Of course, you have no way of knowing what you'll really be doing—or wanting—in five years. But of all the forces that will be operating on your life over those years—chance and love and loss and luck, health and economics and history—your wish and will, your own unfolding, should be one of the strongest. And it can be. That's what this book is all about.

Here, for instance, is what my writer friend Julia put down:

1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
write	write	live in Mexico learn Spanish	house in country have baby	study violin

Having this sketch of the next five years on your planning wall serves two purposes. It gives you an extra nudge to meet your deadline because it reminds you of all the adventures that are still waiting for you. And as you log in solid progress toward your current goal, those future dreams are also going to start looking much more real and possible. Your reach will grow with your grasp as you realize from experience that you really can shape your destiny with your own hands.

*The Next Step*

Tonight	Tomorrow

Like your weekly calendar, this is most conveniently drawn on a pad of paper you hang on your planning wall. You can tear the top sheet off every day and fill out a new one, entering the information from your weekly calendar.

It may seem redundant to write down again what you're going to do tonight or tomorrow when you've already got your actions laid out day by day on your wall and in your pocket calendar. But it can be tremendously helpful, and I'll tell you why. First of all, it lets you clear your mind of everything but what you have to do the next day. You can focus on that one action and make sure you're prepared for it. If you have a phone call to make at lunch hour from the office, you'll want to make sure you've got the number written in your pocket calendar. You may want to run through what you're going to say, or even make cue notes for yourself. If you have an interview coming up, it might be a good idea to rehearse it, and to pick out what you're going to wear so you won't be frantic in the morning. I'll have a lot

more to say about preparation in the next chapter. It's one of the world's greatest antidotes for the shakes.

Second, a tonight/tomorrow sheet is a forceful reminder that action is always *now*. The present is where it's got to be happening, or it isn't going to happen at all. The most important action in your whole plan isn't that big meeting next week, or even your goal—it's what you're going to do *tomorrow*. Your goal is only as real as that step! Handle it as best you can, and your goal will take care of itself. Don't handle it—and the biggest talent or the best imagination in the world won't budge you one inch off dead center.

That's reassuring, in one way. You can forget all about the exaggerated fantasies of glory and fears of defeat that gather around a large ambition like angels and devils, and concentrate all your creative energy on the text of one phone call or one page of prose. But in another way, that first call, or that first blank sheet stuck in the typewriter, is going to scare you more than anything in your wildest dreams.

Because it's real.

What are you going to do for your goal tomorrow?

This is where the fear—and the fun—really starts.