

Created for nez living: sophisticated & sustainable stationery

by Carlina Scalf Ventures, December 2023

The Intentional Productivity Guide

From overwhelm to clarity: how to set good goals & live with intention

Presented by nez living: sophisticated & sustainable stationery

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From Constant Busyness to True Productivity

Where do our days go? When you're in the flow of life, it's easy to get buried under daily tasks. Between work, chores, household maintenance, and family obligations, your to-do list may start to feel unmanageable and overly full. Even more than that, it may also feel **scattered** — lacking focus or direction. You may be getting a lot done, but you're not sure what it's all adding up to.

But what if your to-do list was *more* than just your to-do list? What if it was intentionally building toward something greater, something that aligned with your deeper inner purpose?

That's why we developed **the Intentional Productivity Guide**. This guide will outline how to go from a scattered, never-ending to-do list to a focused, prioritized day that is built around intentional goals that *you've* set for yourself. Instead of letting outside priorities control your time, you can rest in the knowledge that you are in control of your day, and that the time you're spending on tasks is building toward a higher vision for your life.

Step 1: Setting Goals That Matter

The first step is answering this question: **What do you want your days to add up to?**

Set aside some time **to sketch out your short-term and long-term goals**. Which areas of your life are you focused on right now? What changes are you hoping to make within the next year?

There are many possible themes that you can focus your goals around. Some ideas to get you started include:

- Community involvement
- Family relationships
- Friendships
- Fun / personal interests
- Health and fitness
- Having a positive impact on the world
- Money / finances
- Partner / relationship
- Personal development
- Work and career
- Your own wellbeing
- Other themes you find important

As you set your long-term goals, it may be helpful to think about **your core values**. Which parts of life are most important to you? Which areas are you hoping to make progress in over the next few years?

If you'd like to go deeper on identifying your core values, you might enjoy [the Wheel of Life Exercise](#) from the Co-Active Training Institute. Visit the link to learn more and complete the exercise.

You may also find it helpful to practice **visualization**. Visualization is the practice of taking time to picture your future self in your mind's eye. It can help you gain clarity about what your true desired future looks like, apart from anyone else's input. The visualization exercise below may be helpful to practice as you sketch out your short-term and long-term goals.

Visualization Exercise:

Find a comfortable, quiet spot. Once you feel calm, close your eyes and **visualize yourself one year from now**. As this image becomes clear in your mind, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where are you?
- Who is with you?
- What are you doing?
- How do you feel?
- What kind of daily activities are you engaged in?
- What is different about your life in this vision as compared to your life today?

Once you have a clear picture in your mind, write down any reflections based on this image. Then, review the list of goal themes above. Which areas of your life could you set goals in to achieve this vision? What kind of goals will best support you as you pursue the life you pictured?

Feel free to repeat this exercise and substitute “three years,” “five years,” or “ten years” to help you visualize your long-term goals.

The Science Behind Goal-Setting

The power of goal-setting has been well-documented in recent psychological research. Various studies have found that goals often benefit us by:

- Directing our attention
- Mobilizing our efforts
- Increasing our persistence
- Motivating strategy development
- Motivating action based on strategy development
- Allowing us to allocate time and energy more effectively
- Increasing the speed with which we meet our daily targets

One notable advancement in the study of goals was Locke and Latham’s **theory of self-regulation**. It suggested that goals are a key factor in self-motivation. Further research built on that idea by stating that **a goal has to have three components** in order to be truly self-motivating:

- **Proximity** – You are more likely to be motivated to accomplish a goal if you will experience positive effects from it in the **near** future, rather than the far future. If you are setting long-term goals, you can make a goal feel more proximal by identifying mini “sub-goals” to accomplish along the way (e.g., finishing the first semester in a higher education program, finishing the first 20 pages of a book manuscript).
- **Difficulty** – For a goal to be truly motivating, **the difficulty level must be just right** – not too easy and not too challenging. This is in line with pioneering psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of “flow” — the experience of being totally immersed in an activity. Among other characteristics, a flow activity must have the right balance of difficulty for your skill level. If a goal is challenging, but not impossible or outlandish, it will likely yield the right amount of self-motivation.
- **Self-Directed** – Goals that you set yourself, with intention, tend to be more motivating than goals set by others. They most likely have a connection to your deeper interests and vision for your life. (That’s why **intentional productivity** is so important!)

Goal Refinement Exercise:

Now that you know more about what makes a good goal, review your brainstorming from the previous activities. Measure the goals you previously set against these questions:

Proximity

- How soon will I reap positive rewards from this goal?
- If this is a long-term goal, how can I break it down into subgoals?

Difficulty

- How confident am I that I can achieve this goal?
- Can I adjust the difficulty level in any way to make this goal more exciting to me?

Self-Direction

- Are these goals authentic to who I am?
- Are they aligned with my personal values in some way?
- Do I feel personally excited and motivated to accomplish these goals?

Step 2: Managing Your Time Effectively

Now that you've identified your personal goals, **the next step is making time for them**. How can you manage your time so that you can make measurable progress toward your goals?

Time management is a skill that you can cultivate, practice, and refine over time. If you struggle to get a hold of your to-do list, don't worry! With a little bit of knowledge and a lot of practice, you can go from time anxiety to all-star time management.

All good time managers practice two key skills:

- **They are aware of the reality of time.** They know that time is limited, and they can estimate (with some accuracy) how long certain tasks will take them.
- **They make their own conscious decisions.** Even when it's difficult, they don't let others control their calendar. They treat their own day with respect and set boundaries so that they have the right amount of time to complete their work.

To practice both of these skills — time awareness and firm decision-making — try out the time tracking exercise below. Becoming a better time manager starts with understanding how you're currently spending your time.

Time Tracking Exercise

For at least three days, track how you're spending your time, down to the half-hour. You can [make a simple log on paper](#), or you can [use a time-tracking tool](#) to figure out how long you're spending on certain tasks.

Once you've tracked your time for a few days, review the results and ask yourself some reflection questions:

- Which tasks are taking up most of your time?
- Are these tasks aligned with your goals?
- Are you surprised by any of your observations?
- What changes would you like to make to how you're currently spending your time?

Additional Tips for Becoming a Better Time Manager:

- **Establish a few tasks that you accomplish at the same time every day.** These tasks should be aligned with your long-term goals, and can help you build habits and routines that are based around your deeper intentions (example tasks might be reading for 20 minutes each morning, taking a 10 minute lunch walk each day, or meditating for 5 minutes each night).
- **Make your daily to-do list every morning or the night before.** Planning is a critical part of your shift from having the best of intentions to taking true action. By making your to-do list ahead of time, you're more likely to jump in and start making progress right away once the day begins.
- **Keep a tidy workspace,** which can lead to a tidy and peaceful mind.
- **Establish time-saving work routines.** Examples might be setting aside specific times of the day for calls and emails; having an agenda for meetings; or having a protocol around handling your email inbox so it doesn't overwhelm you.
- **And, avoid multitasking** — it's a myth! (:

Step 3: Dealing with External Interruptions

We're all familiar with external interruptions — they are the pings, chats, texts, emails, calls, and other incoming data that distract our brain and demand our attention. If you struggle to find peace and clarity in today's digital workday, you aren't alone. Many of us are still learning how to best manage the digital data that arrives in our inboxes and cell phones every day.

The next time you're feeling overwhelmed by external interruptions, try out these two strategies for handling distractions:

Leave Space: Build “Buffer Time” Into Your Schedule

When we get excited about a goal, it's easy to set impossible deadlines. Our enthusiasm convinces us that we can accomplish this task in record time! The reality, however, is that we'll likely face distractions and dips in motivation along the way. Then, if we fail to meet a goal by our self-imposed deadline, we may experience disappointment about failing to meet our target.

The solution? Practice being real with yourself. When you set deadlines, leave yourself some cushion time for external interruptions, unplanned events, and periods of low motivation or energy. Your future self will thank you for building in buffer time so that you can accomplish your goals and stay calm along the way!

Make a Plan: The Pomodoro Technique

When a task comes in, it's helpful to run it through a system. One system you can experiment with is **the Pomodoro Technique**. It will help you gain focus by breaking down the total time needed for the task into smaller parts. That way, you use time to your advantage and are working *with* time, instead of against it.

The pomodoro technique is meant to:

- Lower anxiety
- Enhance focus
- Manage interruptions
- Increase your awareness

- Lead to better clarity of thought

Activity: The Pomodoro Technique

1. When a task comes in, look at it and ask yourself two questions:
 - a. Where does this fall on my priority list?
 - b. How much time will it take me to complete it?
2. Divide the task into subtasks. Ideally, each subtask will take you about 25 minutes. After each subtask is done, take a 5 minute break.
3. After repeating this process 4 times (2 hours total), take a longer break of 15 to 30 minutes, where you do little things like getting coffee, stretching, etc. that will give your brain a break.

Other Methods for Managing External Interruptions

- **Be clear with others and say “no” sometimes.** Instead of reaching for an automatic yes, be clear and kind with others about the time available to you, and say no to tasks that you can’t take on. Great time managers are also great protectors of their time!
- **When a new task comes in, use the 2-minute rule.** If a task can be accomplished within 2 minutes, do it right away (e.g., sending a quick email reply or meeting invitation). This protects you from the mental stress of adding more unfinished items to your to-do list. The less items on your list, the clearer your mind will be.
- **Make quicker decisions.** Decisions are one of the trickiest parts of time management. If you struggle with indecision around complex problems, consider writing down a few powerful questions you can ask yourself each time you’re struggling. Behavioral scientist Nuala Walsh recommends these three as a shorthand: 1) *If I make this decision, what’s the worst-case scenario?* 2) *What is the likelihood of this scenario happening?* 3) *If it did happen, what could I do about it?* This framework empowers you to put a decision into perspective and

remember your ability to change course in the future if needed. For more tips on decision-making, [check out Walsh's Tedx Talk](#).

- **Bookmark some tasks for later.** If a task will take a longer amount of time, set it aside and write yourself a note to come back to it later, after you've finished your urgent work. Then, follow-through on your self-promise! As you start to keep these mini-promises to yourself, your brain will trust that you can bookmark work, forget about it for now, and still accomplish it at a later time.

Step 4: Dealing with Internal Interruptions

You may know internal interruptions by another name: **procrastination**.

Procrastination is a part of being human. In technical terms, it is the delaying of an aversive task, even though we know we will be worse off for delaying it. On top of this, the difficulty *increases* the longer we put something off. The longer a task looms, the more stress we feel.

Procrastination can lead to negative mental and physical health symptoms. Despite this, it's a very human impulse. We procrastinate for many reasons:

- To get instant gratification from another task or activity
- To protect ourselves from failure
- To regulate our emotions
- To stay in a good mood in the short-term

These are all understandable reasons to procrastinate. Still, it doesn't justify the negative effects we will feel from it. Procrastination can lead to negative self-talk, which can lower our persistence, self-image, and motivation.

The solution? Become future oriented. A future orientation means that we are mindful of our future self and act in a way that benefits that person. As humans, our default is to reduce short-term discomfort. If, however, we can recognize the long-term benefits of something, we can often push through short-term discomfort for long-term gains. The more future-oriented we are, the less we tend to procrastinate, because we are protecting our future self from additional stress.

The first step in becoming more future-oriented is becoming more mindful of the present moment. When we connect to the present moment, we are better able to visualize our future self and take the action that is most aligned with our long-term goals. This reduces stress and helps us approach the current moment with calm instead of overwhelm.

Try practicing these four steps the next time you feel the urge to procrastinate:

- Notice it, name it, and accept it
- Write down the activity you want to engage in *instead* of the task at hand
- Write down a time in the future when you can engage with this other task

- Once you've written down your notes, return to the task at hand

For more on working with the brain during procrastination, check out [this 6-minute video](#) from TEDEd.

Conclusion: Live with Intention, One Day at a Time

Congratulations! You've made it to the end of the Intentional Productivity Guide. In the pages above, you:

- Learned why setting goals is so important
- Learned how to set intentional goals
- Learned how to manage your time effectively
- Practiced strategies for dealing with external interruptions
- Practiced a strategy for dealing with internal interruptions (procrastination)

Now, armed with knowledge, strategies, and practices, we hope you can tackle each workday with a little more confidence, clarity, and peace of mind.

And remember — **living with intention is a lifelong journey**. You won't be able to implement all of the tools and strategies in this guide tomorrow, but if you're able to make even one or two of them a part of your regular routine, we believe you'll experience much success.

Thank you for learning with us, and happy planning!

About nez living

nez living facilitates your intentional lifestyle by crafting sustainable stationery with [vegan materials](#) and [eco-friendly practices](#). At the same time, we safeguard [premium quality standards](#) and enhance your [wellbeing and productivity](#) in style.

To view our full line of notebooks, [visit our shop page](#).

Our Story

The story of nez living can be brought back to a moment in time **when founder Vanessa was searching for a new notebook. She was searching for a brand she could trust** — a brand with a story, a brand that had values aligning with her own, and a brand that understood the importance of providing a high-quality, lasting product. When she couldn't find a stationary brand that fit this description, she decided to make one of her own: and, after a winding entrepreneurial journey, **nez living was born!**

Our Values

nez living is a values-based company. We strive to deliver high-quality, long-lasting notebooks that are also kind to our planet. Our core company values include:

- Using vegan and eco-friendly materials
- Implementing sustainable practices to minimize waste
- Keeping our carbon footprint as low as possible
- Delivering premium quality by partnering with a small-scale family-run printer
- Creating timeless pieces with sophisticated design elements

Our motto: Timeless, professional, modern.

Learn More

To learn more about nez living and see our latest line of notebooks, [visit our website](#).

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