



THE RULE BREAKERS GUIDE TO SUCCESS

PHASE 1

WHAT ARE YOUR RULES FOR YOUR:

- CALENDAR
- PHONE
- EMAIL
- WORKING FROM HOME
- STRATEGIC THINKING TIME

THE EXERCISE

We all have “rules” for how we interact with the world. Usually the rules are invisible. In order to deal with competing priorities, constant interruptions and to bring about more balance in your life, it’s useful to understand the unwritten rules that drive your choices about where you spend your time, attention and energy.

This exercise starts at the basic level with the tools of our work life. The best way to complete the exercise is to take notes over several days, as you notice how you make your choices.

For example, you are in a meeting with a subordinate. Where is your phone? Do you look at it? What makes you break concentration or interrupt a meeting to deal with something coming in? How does it change when you are in the room with your boss? A family member? Make notes about how you actually behave.

Important: There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Insight is what you are after, not some magical way of perfectly managing your work and life.

CALENDAR RULES

What are your rules for taking a meeting or not? Deciding how long that meeting should be? Bumping one meeting for another? Delegating it to someone else?

PHONE RULES



What are your rules for taking a phone call or letting it roll to voicemail? Interrupting a conversation to answer a text? Leaving your phone on silent or with sound? Turning it off altogether? Make notes about how you consciously and unconsciously use your phone.

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EMAIL RULES

**What are your rules for reading and responding to emails?
Deciding to handle something by phone instead of email?
Do you respond all day, or in certain time blocks? Do you
check all day or in time blocks?**

WORKING FROM HOME

How do you decide when to stop work or a meeting for an interruptions (i.e. children, spouse, deliveries, pets, etc.)?

How do you know when to shut down for the day when your commute is within your own house?

STRATEGIC THINKING TIME



How do you block out time for Strategic thinking? High focus work? Recovery and re energizing? Group brainstorming/divergent thinking? What kinds of competing priorities can interrupt your focused working sessions?



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PHASE 2

NEXT STEPS

DIGGING DEEPER

STEP 1:

DISCOVERING WHERE THESE RULES CAME FROM



Look at the “rules” you listed for phone, calendar, email and work.

Next to each rule, write down where you learned that rule or who gave you that rule.

Example:

Lynn’s rule on answering the phone: Answer the phone every time it rings, no matter what. I learned that rule from having landline phones without caller ID. If the phone rang, you never knew who it was. It could be an emergency. So we always answered the phone.

Example:

Lynn’s rule on strategic thinking time: I will focus on strategic work only when all the other work, no matter how important, is done. Mom taught me this one. I had to clean my room and put everything away in order to do anything else, whether play, finishing homework, or eating dinner. So I learned to do less important things in order to earn myself the right to do the things I want to do. This leaves me little or no time to do the things I consider very important.

STEP 2: RATE YOUR RULES



Next to each rule, give it a rating, according to the following scale:

1. This rule absolutely serves me. I must keep it.
2. This rule serves me occasionally. I will keep it when it serves me.
3. This rule just is. Not sure it either helps or hinders me.
4. This rule usually doesn't serve me. I need to experiment with ways to change it
5. This rule definitely does not serve me. It's time to make up a new rule.

Review the items your rated either a 4 or a 5. You might be tempted to try to change all of these. Resist the temptation. Change happens in small increments.

What is ONE rule you could change that would bring just a little more balance to your life?

STEP 3:

DIG DEEPER



When you reviewed the Rules of your competing priorities, chances are you found some rules that go deep.

Example:

Lynn's rule on Strategic Thinking Time went much deeper than cleaning my room. The "rule" under the rule was that what I wanted to do was not important. What mattered more was to please the others around me, like my parents. After all, they were the ones feeding me. However, as an adult, that rule caused me to put my happiness in the hands of everyone else. It took me years to uncover this rule and even longer to change it.

It does NOT have to take that long to change the rules that don't serve you.

Learn more about learning to break your rules and reach for your tools in my book *Dancing the Tightrope, What Falling Off a Horse Taught Me About Embracing Pressure, Fear and Uncertainty*. You can find the book on Amazon.

