

How to save time – do it right the first time

Robyn Pearce

For the first six months of this year I was housemother/flatmate/grandmother for my oldest grandson Sam, aged 18 and in his final year of high school. His parents were on an overseas posting. Many times over that period I found myself saying, 'Don't put things off. Do it right the first time and you'll save time by not having to come back to it.'

Below are some of the steps Sam (reluctantly) had to complete before he was allowed to walk out the door in the morning. He nearly missed the bus sometimes, and didn't like being hauled back, but by the end of six months he was markedly better. (I'm a loving but quite strict grandmother – a necessary trait, given an active involvement in the lives of my 17 grandchildren.)

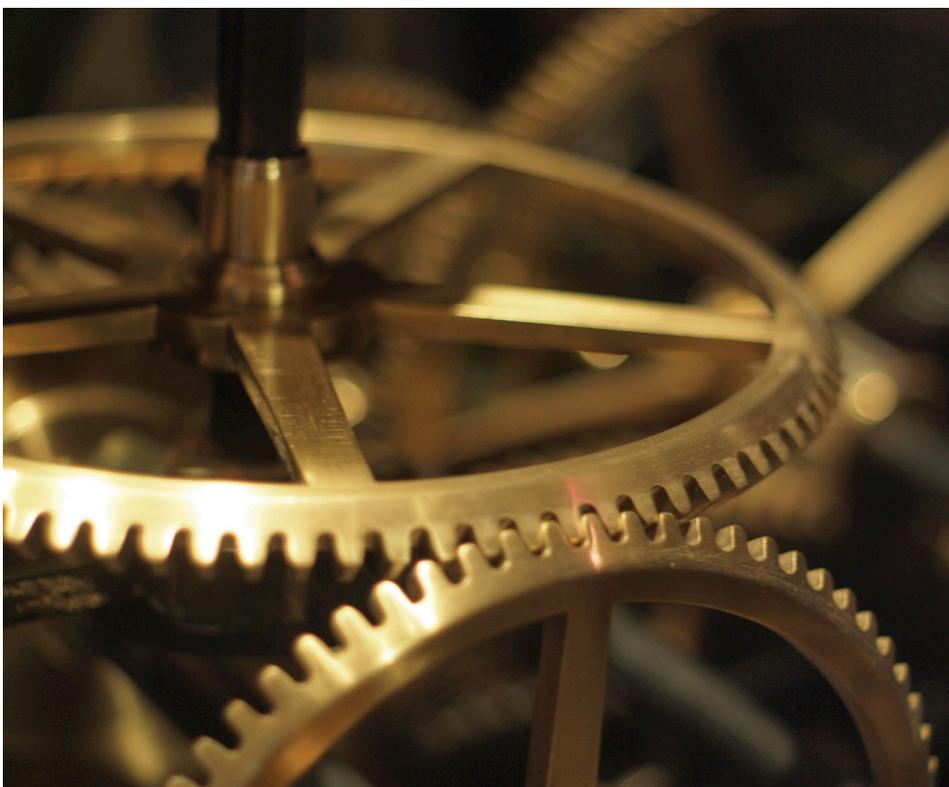
Sam's 'Do It Right the First Time'

House Rules:

- Make your bed as soon as you get out of it. Then you start the day with one job completed. (It was sometimes pretty sloppy, but an attempt was made.)
- Take two seconds to tidy the bathroom instead of leaving towels either on the floor or slung untidily on the rack.
- Put the dishes you've used in the dishwasher. (How many staffrooms have you seen with notes like 'Put your own dishes in the dishwasher. We're not your mother!' Perhaps if the offending people's mothers had been stricter, they would have learned good habits before they ended up in the workforce.)
- When you finish a task, put everything away before you move on to the next project.
- Look around a room before you leave it. What doesn't live there?

Interestingly, it's not just children and teenagers who can benefit by the last two bits of advice. Most of the classrooms I've been into, over many years, seem to be pretty tidy at least at the beginning and end of the day. Every teacher I've met gets the pupils to complete and put away before they start on the next activity. With up to 35 children in a room, things would rapidly degenerate if this wasn't enforced.

However, take a look at many teachers' desks or work areas and the same standards often don't apply. How many teachers do you know whose desk, or office if they're senior enough to have one, could be breeding cockroaches and they wouldn't know! Some will say they're too busy to put away before they commence the next task, but if that's the case, how is it that other equally busy staff have well-managed and efficient spaces?



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If you can identify with this issue, try this statement for size.

Every piece of paper, information and equipment lying around is a symptom of a decision not made or an action not completed.

I believe tidiness and completion are just habits – and if it's important enough we can learn them. Talk to anyone who struggles with opposite habit – of incompleteness – and most will agree that they almost always struggle with a sense of overload, feel that they're not on top of things, and have lots of loose ends rattling around in their heads.

Now, confession time. In my teenage and early adult years I was messy too. The change came about because:

- a) I began to notice the sense of calmness and serenity when walking into tidy houses
- b) I made a decision to improve
- c) I modelled myself on the habits of my lovely mother-in-law, who had very tidy habits.

The change wasn't instant, but bit by bit the new behaviour became the new norm.

One more tip that might be helpful. Become a walking question mark on how to streamline and simplify tasks. The aim is to handle things only once. Great ideas pop up when you watch out for them.

And the happy conclusion to the grandson story. At times the path for both of us was rough and challenging but I'm happy to report that Sam is now in the 'tender' care of the best neat-freak training school in the world – the Army – and loving it. He's half-way through Basic Training and will emerge soon as a trainee Army chef. Thank you Mr Sergeant Major for continuing and consolidating the lessons!

ET



Robyn Pearce is known around the world as the Time Queen, helping people discover new angles on time. Check the resources on her website <http://www.gettingagrip.com>

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