

The Present Principle

Seven Steps to Life in the Now



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We have more control over our days than we think.

It's true.

We may not govern all the events that come to pass in our lives, but we do control our responses.
And that control can best be exerted in the morning.

Mornings set the course of our days, and even in times of darkness, stress, or turmoil, we can take daily steps to ensure that our days are better, brighter, and more full of the life we seek. It doesn't matter if you're a night owl or a morning lark. It doesn't matter if you do your best work or your worst work in the morning hours.

What does matter is you live on an earth where morning serves as the beginning to each new day.
Every day.

We've all heard that routine is beneficial. There is no more beneficial routine than the one you set in the morning.

There are seven steps to a winning day, and they all begin in the morning.

It's called The Present Principle.

If you lead your morning, you can lead your life.

~ The Seven Steps of the Present Principle ~

{Prescription: seven steps, every morning.}

P = Pray (pause, peace)

R = Read

E = Express

S = Schedule

E = Exercise

N = Nourish

T = Track

What to Express ~

- Reflections on the day's passage.
- What you hope for or dream of in this waking moment.
 - Life skills or qualities you seek to cultivate.
 - Goals.
- People or situations you are praying for or wishing well.
 - A statement of gratitude.
- Everything on your mind. *Everything*. Lists. Prose. Sketches. Poems. Turn thoughts to paper. Free your mind to breathe. *Express*.

The Seven Steps of The Present Principle

Good days and bad days have one thing in common: they both begin in the morning.

I believe that by taking ownership of your mornings, you can take ownership of your day – setting yourself on the right track for a *good day*.

This manifesto (The Present Principle) is about giving you your day back.

Let me explain.

My days used to get away from me. Sometime between the pillow and the pillow, I ran about, randomly plugging in important and not-so-important activities into the fifteen hours of waking time life had allotted me. It was ineffective.

It was a mess.

For me, it was in realizing that I needed to change that change first began.

I'm a huge fan of acronyms, because they help me to organize my thoughts and better follow the many things I want to remind myself to do. Although I have used the Present Principle for years, it wasn't always called that. Instead, I spent

years using a nonsensical string of consonants to remind myself of the seven important things I wanted to do each day.

I used to write this nonsensical string of letters on pieces of paper all around me, reminding me to do the seven steps I sought to complete each day because I couldn't remember the string of letters. I realized the strangeness of it all, one day, when I had used a doctor's prescription to write my "word" on. When the pharmacist asked – "what's *JJEMMPPR*?" I realized it had gotten too far.

I needed a better word. (Sadly, I'm still working on the scraps of paper habit).

Shortly thereafter, my brain realized that with a little effort my unsightly onomatopoeia could be reshaped into a wonderful word of portent: PRESENT.

Forever after, my quiet time (the day's start to my seven step completion) became my PRESENT time, and my daily seven steps became the PRESENT Principle.

Here are the seven steps to the PRESENT Principle that are essential to giving me the best day I can create before life hits.

P = pray (pause, peace)

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In short, the PRESENT Principle is a way of proactively organizing – or, *visioneering* – my day, starting in the morning.

Every morning, and every day.

Starting the seven steps in the PRESENT Principle in the morning (and not later in the day) is key. When I wake, I give myself the “present” of PRESENT time. If you already have a moment in your day set aside, you may currently call this “quiet time”. For me, calling it “PRESENT time” reminds me of the gift I’m receiving when I take this time out of my busy day of demands to think about me and my soul. And it’s one more reminder to be present as I begin the seven steps that I believe are key to giving me success, happiness, and fulfillment.

Step 1: Pray (or, Pause, Peace)



We all long for peace.

And there is no better way to grant ourselves a sliver of it than to make our days open with its presence.

What is peace?

Prayer. Meditation. Silence. A moment of pause.

Take the word “pray” to mean whatever act of cultivating peace best reaches you.

Whatever you call it, this is without a doubt one of the most important parts of each and every day you live. Taking a moment in which you try to think about solving the problems of (your) world is fundamental if you ever want to get actually get out there and solve them. Beginning your morning with this step is essential, and in every morning routine I have tried, this has always been the first step I return to.

What is peace for me?

For me, this is prayer. On some days, it is also meditation on some days. It happens with tea. In silence, or with [beautiful music](#). It serves as such a strong, lasting, positive memory from one day to the next that, upon waking, *I look forward to it.*

Whatever Pray (or peace, or pause) means for you, let it give you quiet and calm in the morning.

Here are some suggestions on cultivating an atmosphere of peace for your morning:

- Be alone
- Hot beverages are welcome additions
- Cozy chairs

- Comfortably warm (or cool) temperate for your body
- A beautiful view, a pretty picture
- [Soothing music](#).
- A candle or incense
- A bell to help you signal the moment's beginning or end

Step 2: Read



I still remember the first time I heard someone use the word “read” to mean more than simply to pass one’s eyes along the words on a page.

I had recently moved to Kenya and was living in an orphanage where dozens and dozens (187, to be exact) of children were constantly preparing for exams. I was convinced (!) that Kenya was the only country on the planet that provided students with near constant examinations. During what seemed (to me) their eternal study hall sessions in the floor above my orphanage apartment each night, they would try to cram all the knowledge they could into their brains.

Although I knew they needed help, I didn't understand that they were asking me for it.

“Will you help us to read for our exam?” One asked me one day on the way to their study hall after dinner.

“Help you *read*?” I questioned.

I was no stranger to helping young kids read – but these were teens who well knew the ins and outs of Jack and Janes trips up the hill.

And that was when I learned about the word **read**.

In England (and many of her former colonies like Kenya), the word “read” is used the way Americans use the word “study”. Later, when I attended graduate school in England, I would learn this all to well.

I better go “read” for my exam. You clearly didn't “read” enough for yours. And, yes, libraries are for “reading” (and reading!). In this step in the Present Principle I want you to remember your friends across the pond. Think of READ as not just a time to literally absorb the words on paper, [Kindle, or Nook](#), but to reflect on these words and absorb them. To, literally, *study* these words.

I read [100 books a year](#). I read *none* of those in my PRESENT time in the morning. Instead, the “reading” I do in this present time is a chance to study a passage and reflect on its meaning. In a year of mornings, I *might* get through one book in total.

If I'm lucky.

When you're working on the Read step, it's time to throw everything you learned about speed-reading out the window and instead to embrace a love for diving into passages and staying there.

For many of us, this READ step may mean a bible study early in the morning. Either in a traditional sense of following 365 lessons over the course of a year, or in the less traditional sense of you – solo – plowing your way through a bible or other religious tome from January 1 until December 31.

If you're not religious, though, don't turn your back. Reading any type of motivational quotations, affirmations, or stories in the morning time is an amazing way to start your day, and a wonderful way to help center your practice of silence and meditation (what I call “pray” in the present principle).

Looking for a great motivational devotional to help you?

Here are a few I have loved over the years:

- [Simple Abundance](#): A Daybook of Comfort and Joy
- [The Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude](#)
- [My Utmost for His Highest](#)
- [Illuminata: Prayers for an Everyday Life](#)
- The Bible (I also read [The Message](#) in my morning Present Time)

Step 3: Express



Expression is what our soul longs to do, and no truly good day can begin without us at our most vulnerable crying out our deepest longings, feelings, fears, and desires. After first centering yourself in Step 1, Pray (be it peace, pause, or prayer), and then focusing on Read, it's now time to give your own personal expression to these moments. In a journal or notebook devoted to such writings, take a moment to write.

What should you write about?

In some ways, the world is your oyster.

If you've never kept a journal before, the most important step is simply getting things down on paper – whatever those things are. No matter if it's a letter to your realtor or a gluten-free grocery list. Over time, the goal is to express your true, personal feelings in this space. For a great book on starting (and progressing) in the journaling process, see Alexandra Johnson's [*Leaving a Trace: On Keeping a Journal*](#).

Once you've graduated in your journaling to the point that you have no problem sharing your feelings (whether high or low) it's important to remember that part of the step to EXPRESS in the Present Principle is truly about a guided time of writing.

Think of it this way: although it is *critical* to simply express what is in your heart, it is also important to at least end a morning journal entry with a time of focus, reflection and direction for the day ahead.

Here are a few key things you want to incorporate into any morning EXPRESS time. Don't feel pressure to address all of these, but rather use them as a starting place to help your guide your time to be both emotionally healthy and productive.

Some ideas for what to EXPRESS:

- What you learned in the reading and any reflections you have on it.

- What you hope for the day, the week, the year, and your life as you sit in the quiet calm journaling this morning.
- The concerns that you can't get out of your mind – all those nagging things scratching away at your mind. Studies show that writing these things down actually frees space in your brain for you to think. Don't keep your brain space taxed with the task of remembering things. Instead, write them down. You can use your brain for the important stuff (like prioritizing what of the many things really needs to get done.)
- All the things you have to do – everything. Not in a list or numbered way. Just expressing all the thoughts that are in there to get them out of your mind and onto paper.
- The things you are grateful for. For anyone trying their hand at journaling, finishing each journal entry with a statement of thanks, or a list of things you are grateful for, is a small way to put you in a thankful mood.

Step 4: Schedule



For many, schedule is a bad word.

Schedules are the dusty, illegible, oversized pages of the piano teacher you hated, always penciling in *just one more session* that kept you miserably indoors on bright, sunny days. (Or maybe that's just me.)

I'm willing to bet, though, that you have your own skeletons in your scheduling closet.

But what if I told you that schedules should set you free? What if I told you that the best schedule represents the very essence of freedom?

I'll say it again.

A schedule should set you free to live.

A schedule should be a way to find the time to do the things you need to do so that you know they can get done. A schedule should then give you all the flexibility you need to change it, and none of the guilt of “missing” a dreaded appointment.

So how can you achieve such a dreamed-for schedule?

Throw out your preconceived notions and make your own.

As we explored in the EXPRESS step, it is essential to get all your thoughts out on paper. At least once a week (although I recommend doing this quickly every day and more in depth once a week), write down all the nagging things that you know you need to do, think you should do, or worry about not doing. Clarifying these for yourself (I love a pictorial format like a [mind map](#)) is incredibly freeing. At once, you see all the things you have on your plate.

Then it's time to really look at them.

Once your brain no longer has to use its energy storing all your many tasks and ideas, then use your brain energy to prioritize that day's tasks. Stick to a few critical things each day, and a handful of smaller items. Then, go about scheduling these items into your day around – finding (potentially flexible) time slots when you will complete each item. You are not superman, and your schedule shouldn't look like his. Importantly, allow buffer time, flexible time, and downtime when one task finishes and another begins.

Remember – a schedule should be a realistic approximation of a real day in your life, not a terrific opportunity for disappointment self-flagellation.

Need more?

Amy Lynn Andrews has a wonderfully simple and inexpensive book, [Tell Your Time](#), that takes a great approach to scheduling as well. Another book I like is called [The Clockwork Muse](#). (Although specifically written for writers, it is an excellent tome on organizing your time and maximizing small moments in your day.) [Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity](#) and [The Power of Full Engagement](#) are other favorites I re-read nearly every year.

Step 5: Exercise



Recently I was listening to one of my favorite podcasts ([Simple Mom](#) with Tsh Oxenreider) and she was talking with Rachel Meeks of [Small Notebook](#). They were discussing the importance of exercise, and Rachel Meeks made a comment that made me stop in my tracks as I ran (yes, I love leaving my favorite podcasts as “treats” I get to do when exercising – which is not always what I’m excited about).

She said that reframing the word exercise into the word MOVE is incredibly powerful and motivating.

Indeed.

The easiest way to make yourself go on a twenty minute run is to tell yourself that you're only going to run for twelve minutes – or nine, even. At the nine minute mark, you are much more likely to push yourself to twenty.

I am convinced that it is this strategy alone (along with my passion for podcasts and saving good ones for runs) is the very reason I became a marathon runner.

I am the slowest runner on the face of the planet, and I would have never dreamed that I would one day be someone who could actually run two marathons in one week (on my couch-loving days when the most exercise I do is pressing the ON button to watch *The Biggest Loser*, I look back on that week and I hardly recognize myself!). Nevertheless, it's true. Thanks to [Lost podcasts](#), I climbed to Everest Base Camp in Nepal.

I've run marathons. I've hiked long and far. And I'm *not* athletic. (No, *really*. Ask my friends.)

I'm just persistent.

Like any good marathon-training program teaches you, the “high” of running farther than you expected to (or ever have before) is incredibly motivating.

Whether you are training for a marathon and run twelve miles for the first time or you run twenty minutes after telling yourself you only have to run nine – you feel immense accomplishment.

I want to be clear that any exercise –movement – is wonderful. Running may not be your cup of tea, and also may not be best for your body, season of life, or personal motivation. Maybe the calm of yoga, or the camaraderie of team sports is what you most need.

Most importantly, find a way to move that you can reliably do, and that you won’t find ways to avoid. Don’t set high weighty goals of three hour bike rides you won’t ever begin, and don’t rely on fancy equipment or membership dues to help you along. We’ve all heard the stories of how many new gym memberships are opened on January 1 of each year, and we’ve all heard the sad endings of how many of those are abandoned by March (if not before).

Find the way you were meant to move.

And do it – each and every day.

Step 6 – Nourish



If you've felt so far that the PRESENT Principle is about sacrifice, I hope that this step will change your mind, once and for all. Nourish is about doing that wonderful thing that makes you feel better – whether it's sticking your hands in a mound of clay to make something beautiful, cooking the perfect tomato sauce, or reading a good book in the corner of a sunny room.

To have a good, healthy, productive day that you look back on and want to repeat you absolutely must nourish yourself.

Gretchen Rubin in her book [The Happiness Project](#) – makes the point that a positive activity should not be one that makes you feel guilty for doing it. I agree. You can't nourish yourself with your vices.

Need some ideas?

- Reading a Novel
- Browsing an Architectural Magazine
- Baking
- Knitting
- Painting
- Writing
- Wrapping a Gift
- Playing Hopscotch
- Picking Fruit
- Planting Herbs
- Making a Smoothie (not for breakfast, but just for fun)
- Taking a Bath
- Listening to Beautiful Music
- Dancing in a Room Alone
- Singing a Song
- Playing a Musical Instrument
- Doing a Crossword Puzzle

- Watching a Favorite TV Show
- Listening to a Favorite Podcast
- Eat a Big Salad

Remember, the NOURISH step should be small enough to fit into each and every day (the week-long yoga retreat, while wonderful, is not the right fit for this exercise), and does not need to stay the same (in fact, I think it shouldn't).

Find small, interesting ways to add new joy into your life and nourish your soul. Finally, remember that the NOURISH step is not just another thing to check off your list. Don't combine it with a necessary task you already do and think that will satisfy the need your body and mind has to truly nourish it each day. For example, making a delicious afternoon smoothie is a way to NOURISH you, and I want you to do that. Does that mean that if you have that wonderful smoothie for breakfast you can count your breakfast prep time as your NOURISH moment of the day? Nope. Same goes for a big wonderful salad. Great to have one, but don't let it take the place of your NOURISH moment.

When you're nourishing yourself, it's important to tell yourself you are doing so. Indeed, this step is as much about finding the time for the moment of self-love than it is the act of what you do during that moment.

Make time to NOURISH you. You need it.

Step 7: Track



[Marcel the Shell](#) is, without a doubt, my favorite YouTube video of this millennium. If you've never seen it, [stop everything to do so now](#). It's worth the three minutes of your life. I promise.

One of my favorite stories that Marcel the Shell tells is about his car – which is, technically speaking, an insect. As Marcel the Shell explains, having a bug for a car is not as easy as you might think. Sure, you don't need to worry about such things as seatbelts and automatic door locks, but the real problem has to do with the GPS system, or lack thereof. See, bugs can't stick to set routes or even reach

set locations on the journeys they make. No matter how hard they try, they always end up off course.

Take one week, when there was a maple syrup spill in the kitchen at Marcel the Shell's house. Result? Every time the bug took passengers like Marcel on a drive, they all just ended right back up at the maple syrup spill – not buying the groceries or picking up the baby Marcel the Shells from soccer practice like they needed to.

Fun? Yes.

Productive? No.

There are different elements to the PRESENT Principle – and different steps require varying amounts of flexibility, self-love and discipline. However, one truth remains across all steps: Implementing them all, every day, will make your day a better one.

So how do you make sure you are implementing them every day? You track yourself to make sure you are.

But the TRACK step is not just about checking a box that you completed the 7 important steps of the day. Instead, it's about seeing where you're excelling,

where you need improvement, and then making incremental steps to reach greater levels of success. At the end of the day, take a look back at your efforts to hit all seven steps in the PRESENT principle. What worked? What didn't? Take thirty seconds to jot a few words down, and then in tomorrow's PRESENT time you reflect a bit more on how to make slight improvements.

Conclusion



We all want better days.

We do.

If every day begins in the morning, then the morning is where change for the better should take root.

No matter how you remember the outcome of a bright clear day in the mountain air or a dusty miserable day spent in the dentist's basement, you cannot un-remember that both days began in the morning.

The PRESENT Principle is about giving you a guiding framework for establishing a positive morning ritual that sets your day in the direction you want it to go.

By waking in the mornings, and following seven simple steps to Pray, Read, Express, Schedule, Exercise, Nourish, and Track, you will be better able to make your day everything you want it to be.

Lead by morning.

Resources

Good Reads

I'm a huge fan of productivity and learning to live and breathe better. Here are some of the books and resources that have helped me so far in my journey.

- [The Power of Full Engagement](#)
- [One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are](#)
- [Tell Your Time](#)
- [The Clockwork Muse](#)
- [168 Hours](#)
- [Organized Simplicity](#)
- [Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity](#)
- [The Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude](#)
- [Illuminata: Prayers for an Everyday Life](#)

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Reflection Questions on the PRESENT Principle

To think. To share. To discuss.

1. **Pray (peace, pause).** What does the first step of the Present Principle -- *pray* -- mean to you? Is it traditional prayer, meditation, or a moment of peace? How will you quiet your soul in your present time?
2. **Read.** The second step of the Present Principle is to *read*. Read in the morning to uplift, inspire, and direct. Any work of motivation will do – providing it makes your soul sing and gives you visions of bright, clear days ahead. What are some specific ideas you have of what you'd like to read in your present time? The bible? An inspirational devotional? A book of quotes? A passage of a particular non-fiction book? Think of three specific works now, and share them with each other. (You can also check out my daily devotional companion, *Lead by Morning: 365 Days of the Present Principle*).
3. **Express.** Pull out your journal every morning. Then, start to *express*. How? *However you want to*. Unfettered prose? A pencil sketch? A quick poem? Take five minutes in the workshop now to practice expression. (Use the back of this paper, it's begging you to.) *Let it out*. Loved your breakfast? Hate the weather? Covet your neighbor's shoes? *Express*.
4. **Schedule.** We live better days when we have a plan. Do you run from hard and fast schedules, or thrive by mapping out your day? Take a moment now to discuss your view on planning and to-do lists, and how you can rethink the word "schedule" to make the idea of mapping your day an appealing and useful exercise each morning.
5. **Exercise.** Exercise is hard. *Moving* isn't. What can you do today to move more and make the fifth step of the Present Principle easier for you to accomplish each and every day?
6. **Nourish.** If you've forgotten to do something for yourself this week month, you're not alone. But now it's time to change that. The sixth step of the Present Principle is to nourish. You! Every day, for ten minutes (or more!), you are Queen. List five live-giving activities right now that nourish you and provide you with special delight. Gardening? Knitting? Pinterest? What present can you give yourself today (and tomorrow)?
7. **Track.** If you don't know where you're going, any train will get you there. *So where did you go today?* Take two minutes out of your evening (and two minutes at the end of this session!) to write down how you did? How many of the seven steps were you able to accomplish? Did you get it done in the morning? Did they make you sing or sulk? Track your progress in baby steps.

Find out More About the Present Principle

- Enjoy the Present Principle? Share this (free) manifesto) here:
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Claire Diaz-Ortiz leads social innovation at Twitter and is a frequent speaker on social media, leadership, and social change. She is the author of [Twitter for Good: Change the World one Tweet at a Time](#) and is known for developing the [TWEET model](#) — a framework to help organizations and individuals best excel on Twitter. Claire holds an MBA and other degrees from Stanford and Oxford, and is the co-founder of [Hope Runs](#), a non-profit organization operating in AIDS orphanages in Kenya. She also owns [Do Well Media](#), [Interwebs Publishing](#) and [Saving Money Media](#). Read more about her at www.ClaireDiazOrtiz.com or via [@claired](#) on Twitter.