

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Conflicting personal desires and needs may at first glance seem innocuous, but they can sap time and energy. If we learn how to resolve them, however, it's possible to move from surviving to thriving

They're common scenarios: you want to go out with friends but at the same time you need to stay in and save money; a work project requires that you stay late in the office but you'd really like to leave on time to make your gym class; you have a list of household chores as long as your arm but you also want to go out for a leisurely stroll in the winter sunshine to boost your sense of wellbeing. These competing needs and desires might at first resemble a harmless, superficial mental tug of war, but they go deeper and can affect your time and energy.

It all comes down to values – the things you believe to be important in life and into which you are willing to put time and energy – which form the basis of decision-making behaviour. These values are useful when decisions are simple and clear, but they can be less helpful when trying to decide between two concerns of similar importance.

When you are focused on achieving one particular goal – for example, achieving good grades in your exams – nothing else gets in the way. But when goals are less clear and there are multiple aims, it gets messy and can cause anxiety, stress and exhaustion. For this reason, it's important to be able to easily decipher between conflicting priorities to remain productive and efficient.

Before taking steps to achieve this balance, you need to identify your goals, work out which ones are clashing and determine if they are as important as each other. Try the following five-step plan to help resolve internal conflicts:

1 Stop ignoring it

You cannot resolve anything that you don't consciously acknowledge. Sometimes when people come up against something they don't like or aren't happy with, their first response is to ignore it in the hope it will go away. But internal conflicts won't. The most common reason for ignoring the problem is because people don't feel they have the energy, time or capability to do something about it. So instead, they push the conflicts deeper down and allow them to take root further in the mind.

The first step to overcoming this habit is to treat the mind and body as you would treat someone else. Listen carefully to what it truly wants and take conscious steps to eradicate the problem from the source.

2 Decide which goal takes priority today

If deadlines are looming, then the overriding priority should be to get on top of your workload and all your actions should lead to that end goal. If you want

to concentrate on your health, then doing exercise and eating well should take precedence. If it's not practical to focus an entire day on one of these goals, then split your time and do a couple of hours studying before going to the gym and then return to your work. This will allow you to address both goals and help to keep you motivated and engaged. It's important to think consciously about these choices and their impact.

3 Learn to say no

Most people like to honour all of their conflicting priorities all of the time, but this isn't possible. Every now and then it's necessary to assess goals and sometimes this involves saying no to something you believe you want. It's not always easy but once you've mastered it, saying no can help you keep a clear head. Declining a post-work beer with colleagues when you want to go to the gym might be fine, but turning down extra office hours to spend time with your family might seem harder. It's important to understand that needs cannot be met every time.

A common German saying is 'the practice makes the master' and this is true when it comes to internal conflicts. The more you learn to prioritise and say no to factors that try to get in the way of your end goals, the easier it will become.

4 Create rhythm rather than balance

Just like an old-fashioned set of scales, life will never be perfectly balanced. Instead, it's important to plan your week around your priorities. Create routines you can stick to, with space for last-minute changes or emergencies. For example, deciding on set mornings or evenings to go to the gym can be a good idea, leaving other evenings free to relax or be with family. Having set plans can actually prevent you from feeling tied down too much.

Creating routines can be hard for those who enjoy going with the flow and take life in their stride, however rather than impose a strict timetable, the purpose here is to find a rhythm that works for you by eliminating your conflicting



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priorities to find peace and calm in day-to-day life. This is a step that should be taken slowly, so instead of changing everything at once, try to alter one aspect initially and let it settle before moving on to the next one.

5 Be persistent

Sometimes, when you are changing aspects of your life and you hit a bad day when not everything goes to plan, it's easy to feel demotivated and give up on

end goals. Don't allow this to happen. Everyone has good and bad days. You might miss that gym class or slip behind on a project, but this doesn't mean you should give up. If you truly want something, you will need to stick at it through thick and thin while reminding yourself of the end goal and associated rewards.

Internal conflicts are part of life and it's nigh on impossible to solve every one of them, but if you strive to limit their

effects it can lead to a less stressful, more relaxed and happier life, where decision-making is better informed and sleep comes more easily.

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