

## Using the Cycle of Productivity to Attain Your Dreams, Part I

By Jennifer Wilmoth, MPS Consultant

If you could achieve anything you wanted, what would it be? For the moment, forget the "hows", how much, how long, how do I, how... you know, those nasty thorns that can deflate a dream in no time flat. I encourage you to take a moment, inhale a deep breath, pause, then let it go and just imagine... If anything were possible, what would you envision for yourself? Picture it's December 2008 and you're reviewing your year, what did you accomplish that makes you proud and brings a smile to your face? Give yourself permission to explore outside your comfort zone – it can be ANYTHING.

When I performed this exercise, I envisioned the empowerment of completing a sprint distance triathlon. I will also share that almost immediately I was inundated by the barrage of logistics, rationalizations and downright fears of never having done anything like this, which made my dream seem impossible and at the very least, way too much work. In that moment I realized I had a choice: my limitations and fears could make the decision or I could turn to the power of my inspirations and desires. I acknowledged my concerns, got clear on what I wanted and decided to take on the triathlon. How will you choose? Dreams can be easily attainable, so I invite you to identify a goal that you want to achieve within the next year and together we'll work through the Cycle of Productivity to accomplish what we set out to do.

The Cycle of Productivity (click [here](#) for illustration) begins with *Identify Meaningful Objectives... with execution plans*. The dream you have envisioned, the "what" you want, that is your Meaningful Objective (MO). The execution plans are the "how" you're going to achieve your dream. The projects, logistics, plans, conversations, negotiations, those are all part of your execution plans. Remember not to let the tactical 'stuff' deter or overwhelm you. We'll take it on one action at a time; it doesn't all have to get done now. I recommend you capture your new MO in a task by putting your Meaningful Objective in the subject line and the execution plans in the notes section of the task. Go ahead and categorize your task as a Meaningful Objective. I recorded "Complete a sprint distance triathlon in 2008" and

## Got a College Student on Your Holiday Gift List?

Consider giving *Take Back Your Life! Using Microsoft Outlook to Get Organized & Stay Organized*. As Iowa State University student Steve Lavrenz recently shared, the TBYL methodology and software have contributed significantly to his academic success:

*"Take Back Your Life! has done wonders for me as a college student. I have been able to prioritize my goals in both academics and extracurricular activities, and create plans for our wedding in 2 years. I find that not only do I have more free time on my hands, but I am also doing a better quality of work, and my grades have reflected this increased productivity. I also love the tips for writing and communicating more effectively to colleagues and peers. I am getting fewer emails back asking me to clarify things, and I feel like I am making more of an impact with the messages that I send to professors and friends. The [MPS Outlook Add-In](#) has also helped me out a great deal. Before, I would send or reply to emails about meetings and other tasks, but would completely forget to file them in my calendar or task pad. Now, with the MPS Add-In, I am reminded every time I send out an email to create the corresponding appointment or task in my Outlook. It's been a real life-saver!"*

Click [here](#) for more recently collected testimonials on MPS products and services!

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## Quick Weekly Review Tip

After you empty all of your collection points, perform a mind sweep, review your objectives, projects and 1:1 categories, and

put it in my Meaningful Objectives – personal category.

The next phase is *Create Strategic Next Actions... with no dependencies*. Reference the MO task you created and determine at least one thing you can do to move your Meaningful Objective forward. It may be placing a call, investigating something online or creating a budget; remember no dependencies means you don't have to wait on someone or something to do it. Capture the action in the subject line of a new task and categorize it accordingly. I created two Strategic Next Actions: "Find a training program for novice athletes preparing for a triathlon" and "Identify the sprint distance triathlon to participate in" and categorized them both as SNA Computer.

The following phase is to *Schedule and Complete Strategic Next Actions... creating integrity*. This is an exercise in doing what you say you'll do – regardless of who's holding you accountable. Do you notice you're more likely to attend a meeting with others than stick to the appointments you set for yourself? I've observed clients doing just that rationalizing it with an excuse like "no one is depending on me to be at the gym." When did you become no one? This is something YOU want; make it as important as whatever your boss, colleague or spouse has asked you for by scheduling the time to do it. I put 1 hour on my calendar to complete my two SNA's.

The last phase in the cycle is to *Review and Acknowledge Progress... being accountable*. This phase is easily overlooked and is just as critical as the others. It's the time to pick your head up from what you're doing and see where you are related to your goal. Are you headed in the right direction? Do you need to make any adjustments? Give yourself permission to be strategic and proactively plan your Meaningful Objectives. Since I have added this MO to my system I will check on it weekly when I conduct my Weekly Review to continuously identify and create the new Strategic Next Actions that will move me forward.

At this point the cycle begins again – open your MO task, identify the Strategic Next Action, schedule and complete it and determine if you're on course to your dream. If you stick with the Cycle of Productivity anything you desire is easily attainable. Whether you dream big or dream small, it all starts with one Strategic Next Action. So I say, Dream BIG!

*Watch for an update on Jennifer's progress in the next edition of our newsletter!*

categorize your results you can click on your Task Pad icon and select the radial dialog box that says Next Seven Days. This allows you to see all of the work that should be calendared and/or placed on your Weekly Review. If you open your Calendar in a second screen, you can move these tasks from this view right on to your calendar!

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## More News You Can Use

- Looking for ways to improve group collaboration? Read Sally McGhee's recent article [Eight Tips for Storing & Editing Documents on Team Web Sites](#). Find more tips at [Get the Point](#), a new blog from Microsoft focused on helping information workers use and understand Microsoft Office SharePoint Server.
- New information for some, a refresher for others, take advantage of another recent article by Sally McGhee: [4 Ways to Take Control of Your Email Inbox](#). Sally's article was a lead feature last month in the United Kingdom-based newsletter, [At Work](#).
- Improving productivity and work/life balance isn't just about tips and tricks. It involves shifts in thinking and ultimately behaviors. You can read more about these fundamental paradigm shifts and other topics in blogger [Matt Cornell's interview with Sally McGhee](#).

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***As 2007 draws to a close, join us in celebrating what worked, recognizing and letting go of what didn't, and preparing for a meaningful and productive New Year!***