

## MIND: Organization

### HANDOUT #3: Maintaining Margin

Taken from Sacred Self-Care by Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes

*The plans of the diligent end up in profit, but those who hurry end up with loss.* - Proverbs 21:5

If you go to a bookstore looking for books on time management, you will likely end up in the business section of the store. [Our world] views time as a commodity that can be spent, wasted, maximized, and managed. Consequently, **most time management approaches focus upon maximizing productivity and efficiency, upon doing more in less time.**

When I was a doctoral student, I had to balance full-time classes with clinical practicum, research, a part-time job, church membership, and, eventually, marriage. I had too much to do and very little time to do it, so I became a master at multitasking (or so I thought). I took my statistics textbooks to my part-time job as a substance abuse counselor, my wedding planner binder to conferences, and my dissertation everywhere. **Every moment had to be filled; it was the only way to get it all done.**

When I began my self-care journey, it was with that multitasking mentality. I took a strategy from one of those time management books and filled every waking moment with some planned activity. Self-care became another task to force into an already crowded agenda. I had learned to align my time with my priorities, but I had too many priorities. The result was that even with plenty of self-care practices, I was stressed, fatigued, and harried.

I needed margin. **Margin is free space, time that is intentionally left open to allow us to slow down, to breathe, and to recenter throughout our day.** Margin allows us to nurture relationships with friends, family, and coworkers rather than speed past them on the way to the next thing. Margin leaves room for the unexpected, the crises and emergencies that have a habit of showing up when our schedules are tight, or even for the unexpected joys.

**Maintaining margin is a discipline of restraint that does not come easily to overachievers** who struggle with self-care. We have to restrain our impulse to say yes to everything and to fill every available space with obligation. We have to restrain our internal pressure to be all things to all

people. It's setting a boundary around our time. We have to block off chunks of time, to say no more than we say yes, and to commit to significantly less than we think we are capable of doing.

**We cannot create time, but with diligence, we can create margin.** And margin is where the real profit is.

### **Today's Practice**

Find a way to create some margin in your schedule today. Here are a few ideas for how you can do this:

- Give yourself extra time for your commute so that you are not rushed.
- End a meeting or activity ten to fifteen minutes before your next commitment to allow for transition time.
- Take your lunch break away from your desk or work area.
- Add one or two fifteen-minute breaks to your workday during which you pause work and move around.
- Put less on your to-do list than you think you can accomplish in a day or week.
- Use a pomodoro timer app to set cycles of work and break time. The pomodoro technique breaks work into short intervals (often twenty-five minutes) separated by brief breaks (often five minutes).
- Cancel, reschedule, or delegate a task or meeting that is not high priority.
- Un-volunteer for something that you have committed to do. Be sure to exercise compassion toward yourself and toward others. Try to do this in a way that does not leave people in the lurch.