

MISE EN PLACE

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10 Minutes At A Time!

By: Ann Michael Henry

Remember the days when you had time to work on a project from start to finish? You actually had 4 or 6 or 10-hour blocks of time to paint a room, dig up a garden, build a deck or clean the basement. Where did those blocks of time go? For me, I'm convinced that they dissolved on the delivery room floor! I love motherhood. Even more, I love the second childhood that comes along with it.

Darn it though, those projects still need to get done. I used to be able to get them done. Why can't I do it now? When did I become so incapable? Could it be that before I wasn't nursing, changing diapers, dealing with naps, doing 62 more loads of laundry a week? I know I can do it, I just know I can...and so I will. Yes, I will paint the dining room today. By dinnertime, I don't even have all of the walls taped up and I'm feeling like a complete failure, totally incompetent and *very* frustrated.

While rationally I know that is not the case, emotionally I'm feeling very beat up. Being the eternal optimist that I am, I know that there is a way. I take time and think. I observe. I start by breaking tasks down. Ok, so I'll have two hours while the baby sleeps to work on a project. Well, it turns out to be a short nap day. That didn't work, but it was a bit better. After a lot of struggling, changing my mindset and accepting that life is simply different now I learned to breakdown projects into 10-minute tasks. Instead of feeling good about completing the entire project, I learned to feel good about finishing the first step, then the second step, then and the third. I learned to feel a sense of accomplishment with each step. It was a hard transition to make, but it was a sane transition to make. I feel good. I feel competent again. Instead of rushing through projects and settling for "getting it done" but not really liking the results, I now get it done *and* like the results. As my son would say, "this is good".

Years later I would meet Beth, a mother of three year old twin girls, a 16 month old son and wife of an overworked husband who was about to start work on his MBA. The family had just moved to their new home, a gorgeous Tudor. Recognizing that life was crazy; Beth wanted to get things under control. As luck would have it she attended a charity benefit to which I had donated a gift certificate for a two hour Organizing consultation.

We walked through her home room by room discussing ways to make life easier. Her home has many wonderful built-in storage spaces; we brainstormed ways to make the best use of them. In a virtual sense we rearranged furniture in the basement, dreamed about the perfect home office and created processes to handle life better. One of the things I shared with her was the "10 minutes at a time" tip. By the end of our meeting Beth had decided to hire me to help organize their home office. With her husband's consulting business, him going back to school, Beth doing part-time work for an ad agency and of course their personal papers, they needed help. But there was a problem. The color. The color of the office just wasn't right. One thing that Beth missed about her old home was that she had all the rooms the color that she wanted. This was very important to her, she wanted to feel comfortable in the office and that wasn't going to happen until she changed the color.

So, what to do first, paint or organize? Paint! We could organize the office and if she wasn't comfortable in the room all of our work would be in vain. So, we made an appointment to work on the office for a few weeks out, giving her enough time to paint.

When I returned the office was done, it looks great, and Beth loves it. "You've changed my life, that 10 minutes at a time thing, oh my gosh, that's how I painted this room, 10 minutes at a time. First I had to tape, I would do 10 minutes at a time. In the past I would try to get the whole thing done at once, by the time I got to the end of taping, it was just slapped on. Not in this room, it was my best taping job ever; it was all done the right way. And, I didn't feel rushed or out of control. It works, I use that 10 minute at a time thing all of the time, it's wonderful. Thank you."

Beth had regained a sense of control. In the two months since our initial meeting Beth has painted the office and the play room in the basement, made curtains for both rooms, rearranged the play room, moved a shelf for toys, rearranged toys for easier use and clean up, implemented a fun "pick up" game with the children and made arrangements to turn the basement office into a quest bedroom...all 10 minutes at a time!

With the help of her mother to watch the children, we took 6 hours over the course of two days and got her office organized. There are times that you need more than 10 minutes, and that is when you bring in support. For all the rest, 10 minutes at a time.

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