

# BLOCK BOOKING YOUR TIME

*Block booking is a way of “capturing your time” rather than reacting to the many urgencies that intrude into your lives. Each of us has the same amount of time in a 24-hour day. What differs between us, is the ways that we manage our time to live our lives effectively.*

*We become time conscious when our shared time goes out of balance; say, when a 2-income home loses intimacy and friendship is lost.*

## **BLOCK BOOKING — CAPTURING YOUR TIME**

Block booking is a simple concept. Each of us has 7 days per week, and, therefore, 21 blocks of time (morning, afternoon, evening). Part of the concept of block booking is to see our days in “blocks” rather than in a series of appointments or hours on a clock.

We know that lots of families don't have time in their busy schedules for blocks — they can barely get together for moments. So the idea is to create blocks for your priorities where you are able.

When we block our time, we block our “**work time**” first. This makes sense as this is the time that we are paid for, or the time that, within the home, we do our chores, parenting and other home responsibilities. This work time usually requires about 10+ blocks per week and this is indicated on the graph with “**Wk**”.

Secondly, we block in our couple, family, friendship time (“**CF**”). Again, we think of blocks, not a few minutes here, and a few minutes there — though this is important too. Both Carole and I talk about 10/10 times for couples when we invest 10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the evening to connect. The Gottmans (marriage therapists) talk about daily 7-second kisses to build intimacy. Obviously, a whole block of this is not what most couples do. Smile.

Selecting 2 hours in one evening or on a Saturday morning for our family or our children has powerful impact. Couples and families that visit with us usually have lost control of their time. It seems to them that life is too busy to have a life.

Of course, we all have additional “incidental” time with our family that just happens. But creating block time for family and couple connection is much more vital than occasional happenings. On the graph of the week, this priority is indicated with “**CF**” depending on whether it is for family (F) or couple (C). Block

in 2+ blocks of time for couple and family. We think that couples should have at least one block for themselves each week. Losing this time could result in parallel lives without much connection.

The third block is for “flex” or “self” and requires a few (2 or more?) blocks each week. This is the time when you do the stuff of your own life (e.g. fitness, reading, taking your car in for an oil change, organizing your filing system, or just doing nothing) and is indicated with “**Fx**”. Note: self-time is not more time to do more work. If you use your flex time for work only, then change your graph to indicate this as work time.

Graphing your week is good practice. On some weeks your time will be manic and on other weeks you may well feel that you have nothing to do! Block booking helps couples and families a lot. Young kids depend on schedules to grow. Worn out marriages need the interruption of planning to make a positive difference.

**ASSIGNMENT**

Graph your week for about one month from today. Be as specific as you can about where you are investing your time.

It is good for being “on purpose” in your family to review weekly your graph at a pre-agreed time with your spouse and/or your kids. Say on a Sunday evening after the football game, you create the week you want.

**AS THE EXAMPLE BELOW...**

This family used Thursday evening as a family night. On that night, they had a special dinner, turned off the phones, computers and TV, played Scrabble and talked about how they were planning their weekends. Since there were 2 teenagers in the family, this planning ahead for the weekend was really important.

	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
AM	Fam	Wk	Wk	Wk	Wk	Wk	Fam
AFT	Fx	Wk	Wk	Wk	Fx	Fx	Fam
PM	C	Wk	Fx	Wk	Fam	Fx	C

This parents had long workdays on Monday and Wednesday (both parents had outside-the-home work) and this allowed self and recuperation (Fx) time on Thursday and Friday. Saturday was a lot of family time as the kids were involved in sports and dance activities.

Saturday night was the couple's "date night" that they sometimes spent with friends, but were often on their own. They also carved out time to talk on most Sunday nights.

### **SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE ABOUT BLOCK BOOKING**

1. Your block booking needs to reflect your work priorities first. Secondly, the family focuses on the times and needs of the kids. In the example above, the family set aside time on Thursday and Saturday to flex around the kids sporting and other activities.
2. Block booking can seem rigid, but it really is about planning. There needs to be lots of flexibility and resilience in making it work for you.
3. Marriage time is important and perhaps the reason you have come for counselling. Making a time where you are not exhausted to go for dinner or a walk makes sense. Watch out that you don't ruin this time with all your computers and phones.
4. Flex time should be something that you look forward to. Be creative about how you spend your time when you commit to flex. In the example above, this couple made Thursday and Friday afternoons some of their Fx time — worked for them. Making a list of what you like to do helps a great deal.
5. Anticipate stress times in your monthly schedule and book accordingly. This does not mean to overwork. It does mean to anticipate that family and flex time are more important because of the demands of the schedule.
6. Anticipate 1 or 2 slow work weeks in slower months that tend to be less demanding for your work. This is a great time to catch up on reading, studying and planning. Make sure that you invest in this slower period rather than dither it away.
7. Book your holidays around the more discouraging times of your calendar year. For example, Carole and I book 2-3 mid-week "weekends" away each year to refresh our marriage and to plan for our future. February, May and November are the months that work well for us.
8. Block booking is not a "jail" for your time. It permits you to live more "on purpose" than if you "winged it" like most people do. Winging it makes your week's circumstance decide your priorities. Block booking places the template of your values on the circumstances of your life.
9. The key to maintaining this habit is agreeing to think through weekly the blocks of your graph. This in itself only takes a moment but determines more than almost anything else the outcome of your week.