

More Plate-Juggling Than You May Have Bargained For

By Kendra Fletcher

When I was a kid in school, August was still fully summer. We didn't have to think about going back to school until after Labor Day as we soaked in every last little bit of swimming, sunbathing, and lazily reading on a beach towel. Since we began homeschooling in 1997, I have watched the "first day of school" dates for American public schools inch into what I still consider to be a summer month. Last year's local public school start date was a shockingly early August 10th. "What in the world?" I said not so gently to my husband. "There's no way I'm starting in August." Flexibility is definitely one of the most beautiful things about homeschooling.

And yet . . . It's not as if I don't have to start thinking about school by August. In fact, I start planning curriculum for each child as early as January of the previous year because I don't want to be bogged down with all of that info in my brain over the summer. I'd rather be reading at the beach (see July's issue). I use the **Evernote** app on my **iPhone**, which also has an online presence (www.evernote.com), and it downloads to my computer too. This means that I can make a list while sitting snuggled on my bed at the end of the day but still be able to access it from my phone the next day when I'm in the car . . . and suddenly get some brilliant idea that needs to be added to whatever I sleepily jotted down the night before. It's my mobile homeschool-planning brain, if you will.

There's no denying it: if you are going to be homeschooling, you've got to learn to be the master of your to-do list, and you've got to get a handle on your day. You're not just a home manager; you're now also the curriculum specialist, teacher, custodian, recess monitor, librarian, lunch lady, reading tutor, and—get this—the entire PTA. It's grossly overwhelming when you look at your job that way, but like any elephant, we need to eat, so we take it a bite at a time.

Top Five

First of all, let's pinpoint your top five "non-negotiables." What are the five things you absolutely must do? Try not to let anyone else's version of "non-negotiable" color what you write down. You'll hear this a lot in homeschooling (actually, you'll hear it a lot in parenting, period): "Oh, you absolutely must do . . ." When people say you must do something (i.e., homeschool classically), you really don't have to. If it's something that absolutely must be done, such as feeding your children so they don't starve, it goes without saying.

Try to block out all those voices and magazine articles and books that are telling you what your top five must-do's are. Ask the Lord to help you identify what the top five things you must accomplish really are.

Now, in a strange twist of events, write down the top five things you do *not* need to do. Make a "not-to-do" list. As one of those insane women who think I must accomplish 752 things every day and cross them all off a list or die trying, the idea of a not-to-do list was totally freeing to me. My insane personality has me always wanting to find the best way of doing something; if I'm going to cook, I'm going to take professional courses and read professional journals and produce gourmet meals three times a day (true story). If I'm going to knit, I'm going to learn to produce professional-quality sweaters because I took a finishing class from a professional at a knitting convention (also a true story). If I'm going to have a kitchen garden this summer . . . Catch my drift? For whatever reason, I am wired to want to learn to do things really, really well, and although that's not necessarily bad, it's

just not realistic. It also drives me to the edge of a cliff most days, because I do, after all, have eight children, and that alone is proof of my overachievement, don't you think?

Creating a not-to-do list doesn't mean that the items you've written down will never get done. It just means that for now, perhaps, those things can slip off the radar, not to be seen again until absolutely necessary or at the time and place when God allows it.

If you're a (dare I say it?) Type A personality like I am, I'll give you a practical example so that you can try and wrap your brain around it: Lunch. I detest making lunch. Before the not-to-do list existed, I was making fresh loaves of bread and pretzels, using homemade jam, and killing chickens out back for fresh chicken salad sandwiches (totally kidding on that last one). Now I give myself the freedom to buy frozen taquitos at **Costco** and call it a day. Guess what? My children are still fed (one of my top five non-negotiables), and I am a saner, happier mom.

You might be the type who can fly well by the seat of your pants, and far be it from me to tell you that you must write a to-do and a not-to-do list. No one will die in your household if you don't. I just know from experience that getting things out of my overly committed mind and onto paper (or my iPhone) is a way to keep the peace in my home. And if I can eliminate some of the plates that I am spinning like a monkey on steroids, then everyone here is happier and homeschooling can actually happen. Maybe for you too!

Kendra Fletcher is a homeschooling mother of eight, aged 18 down to 3. She has never known what it means to homeschool without the presence of preschoolers and loves to encourage other moms who are beginning their homeschool journeys with little ones underfoot. Her website and blog can be found at www.preschoolersandpeace.com.

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