

Take Back Your Weekend...

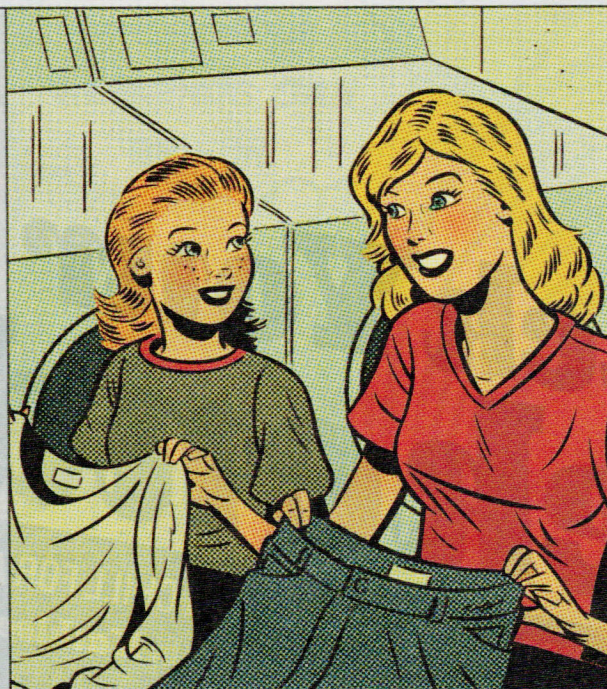
1

... From an Avalanche of Chores

DO A LITTLE AT A TIME, MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY.

Professional organizers insist that performing tasks here and there during the week—spending 20 minutes each evening straightening up, for instance—goes a long way toward making weekend work more manageable. (Don't get us wrong: You may still have to clean the house on Saturday, but you won't have to spend two hours decluttering it first.) Of course, this approach assumes you have time to spare after making dinner, paying bills, tucking in the kids, and getting organized for the next day's commute. One alternative? Tackle chores as you wind down on Friday night—fold laundry, say, while you catch up on the shows you missed during the week.

PUT ALL HANDS ON DECK (EVEN THE SMALL ONES). "Kids can help out a lot more—and a lot earlier—than many parents think," says Laura Stack, president of a time management firm in Denver. When her boys were younger, Stack had them lug laundry down to the basement, empty small wastebaskets around the house, and clear and set the table. Her daughter, meanwhile—as a partial list—cleaned the litter box, loaded and unloaded the dishwasher, packed lunches for school, and vacuumed the living room. (Uh, can we borrow her?)



... From the Same Old Date Night

TRY SOMETHING NEW—TOGETHER. There's nothing wrong with dinner at your local bistro followed by a DVD at home. But according to Arthur Aron, a professor of psychology at New York's Stony Brook University who studies marital longevity, breaking up the routine can lead to a happier union. "If you do novel and exciting things together, you start to associate that excitement with the relationship," Aron says. He doesn't necessarily mean bungee jumping (we asked) or forcing yourself to take up your spouse's favorite hobby. Instead, pick a fresh endeavor you both have an interest in pursuing, be it golf or salsa dancing.

2

CHOOSE ANY ACTIVITY UNDER THE SUN.

We may be stressed, but we still love our weekends—and the great outdoors. A study by psychologists at the University of Rochester last year found that people are almost uniformly happier on Saturday and Sunday than they are during the week. The biggest sources of weekend cheer? Feeling socially connected and being outside, according to study author Dr. Richard Ryan. So make a date with nature. Ryan's research shows that your mood will improve whether you hop on a mountain bike or take a simple evening stroll.

3

... From Disorganization

START PLANNING MIDWEEK. On Sunday night, Wood sits down with her husband and two teens to work out the family calendar.

"We have a brainstorming session about what we want to do that weekend and discuss how we can budget our time so things go smoothly." Make sure to pencil in the fun stuff, too. "Interspersing rewards throughout your schedule will motivate you," says psychologist and time management expert Neil Fiore. Earmark a favorite activity for first thing Saturday morning to prevent chores from trumping play.

FOR BIG PROJECTS, THINK AHEAD—WAY AHEAD. Lorie Marrero, who oversees the organizational coaching website ClutterDiet.com, says that major jobs (garage sales, cleaning out the basement) should be scheduled weeks in advance, with input from the rest of the family. "Lining up everything ahead of time—arranging dumpster delivery, for example—makes weekend projects faster and friction-free," she says. Plus, "looking ahead gives you a greater sense of commitment to the project and accountability to each other."

... From Unrealistic Expectations

DECIDE WHAT YOU TRULY WANT OUT OF THE WEEKEND. Resist making an exhaustive wish list and try to pinpoint one or two things you're really after. For example, do you actually need to "get to the gym," or would you rather find fun ways to fit the exercise in? If it's the latter, why not trade sweating it out on the treadmill for shooting hoops at the neighborhood park with your daughter?

ACCEPT THAT NOT EVERY PROJECT CAN BE FINISHED BY SUNDOWN ON SUNDAY.

Fiore recommends that you focus simply on launching a difficult undertaking—and recognize that it may have to be accomplished in stages, over the course of two or more weekends. "If you're pressuring yourself to find a long, uninterrupted block of time, you're never going to find it. It makes much more sense to say, 'What can I start in the time I have now?'"

4

5

... From Your Kids and Their Activities

REMEMBER: IT'S QUALITY TIME, NOT QUANTITY TIME.

Christine Louise Hohlbaum, author of *The Power of Slow*, has learned that the 20-minute drive to her 12-year-old daughter's Saturday horseback-riding lesson can be a prime bonding opportunity, and that being supportive of her daughter's interests doesn't mean she has to stay and watch the two-hour session. Instead, she swings over to a nearby café, where she sips tea and catches up on the week's newspapers.