



by Marydee Sklar

HERE'S A CHALLENGE FOR YOU. Try to guess the hottest new tool for time management, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Here it is: *paper!* Yup. Old fashioned paper.

Sure, you might have smartphone apps to remind you about appointments and your to-do list. But these digital tools rely on your brain to put them into the app in the first place. Plus, they don't give you that useful bird's-eye view of the future so you can meet project deadlines and goals for home, work, or school.

This doesn't mean you should toss your electronic calendar and reminder apps. You just need to add a little paper to fully support your brain's executive function of planning and prioritizing or what is often called *future thinking*.

What is future thinking?

The typical ADHD brain is most alive and active in the present. This means that whatever is in front of the person, *right now*, is the most urgent thing to do, until something else pops into their line of sight and they start doing that thing.

This bouncy, highly distractible brain simply doesn't see very far into the future. In fact, it's as if the future just doesn't exist other than as a foggy unknown. At a PESI seminar, I heard Russell Barkley, PhD, describe this as our brain's "event horizon line."

For many people, their event horizon line is about three months. For others it may be just a week. I once had a client who figured out that he had an event horizon line of just ten minutes! No matter how many reminders I sent him, our appointments didn't exist for him until ten minutes before we were supposed to meet. That's when he would call or text and tell me that he had to cancel because he was in the middle of some crisis—a crisis that had occurred because he hadn't been able to see it coming. His life was one crisis after another, compounded by a very short event horizon line.



Support Your
Future





Thinking Skills

Everybody needs future thinking

While all ages need to use future thinking, it is really important for rising adults (18- to 30-year-olds) as they move away from the supports of living at home. During these years people are either in college or entering the workforce.

For college students future thinking is critical for completing long-term projects and papers. Think about all of those assignments that your professors gave you weeks to complete. Did you tell yourself that you had lots of time and then end up frantically staying up late (or all night) to finish? Did you maybe even turn them in late? Did you intend to apply for a scholarship or an internship and miss the deadline? Did you miss the drop date for a class resulting in a low grade on your transcript? Those are examples of poor future thinking.

Rising adults also struggle with future thinking in the world of work. Did your boss give you a project deadline and you missed it? Did you get to the end of the month and not have enough money to pay your bills? Did you get fired for showing up late to work?

Poor future thinking can be painful and expensive for anyone.

How paper can help your brain's executive functions

Paper calendars, both monthly and yearly, help to make the future *concrete* and *visible*. They give us a view of time that includes the past, present, and future. With paper calendars, you can see weeks and months in advance, letting you plan strategically to get things done. You can see how commitments and tasks will “fit” together to stop you from becoming overwhelmed with too much to do.

Our phone calendar views are just too small to get the big picture.

The other advantage to paper calendars is that we can keep our future “in sight” by putting them where we can easily see them as reminders of what is coming up in our future. If you are using a phone or computer app for your daily appointments, you don’t have to put all of those on your monthly calendar. Your monthly calendar is primarily for recording significant future events that you need to stay aware of.

What goes on a paper calendar?

The answer to that question will depend upon your life’s needs. The following are some examples to build future thinking and awareness.

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K-12th Grade

- All games and tournaments for sports
- All doctor and dentist appointments
- School holidays
- Special events
- All school project deadlines
- All tests or exams
- Birthday parties
- Family vacations
- Camps

Rising Adults (in or out of college)

- Application deadlines
- Project deadlines
- School/work holidays
- Drop date deadlines for college courses
- Test or exams
- Doctor and dentist appointments
- Variable work dates/times
- Special events
- Vacation dates
- Birthdays

Family (just events that clue in others about what is coming up)

- Doctor or dentist appointments
- Weekend or evening events
- When a parent will be out of town
- For split families - when the kids will be with each parent
- Vacation dates
- Camp dates
- Birthdays
- Starting and ending dates for school
- School holidays

Adult (personal paper calendar)

- Meetings or events for which you must prepare
- Travel from home
- Vacation dates
- Special events
- Deadlines for personal or work projects
- Variable work dates/times

Keep your paper calendar easy to reach

Placement is important. Where should you keep it? *In sight!*

Your calendar needs to be easy to reach in order to write on it. It must live where you will be able to see it often to jog your memory about what is coming up.

I had a client who constantly missed a standing weekly appointment. She told me that she had all of the appointments on her calendar. When I visited her home, I quickly saw the root of her problem: She had hung her calendar on the back of her kitchen door so that it was only visible if she closed the door. Since it was the kitchen door, it was almost never closed. Her calendar was out of sight, thus her appointment was out of mind!

A brain's best support buddy

Years ago, I was a disaster when it came to time awareness and future thinking. Twice I took my kids to birthday parties on the wrong day. Fortunately, I was a day early, but it was very embarrassing for me and my children. I once scheduled my two children in summer camps that started at the same time on opposite sides of the city. I didn't figure that out until about 9 PM the night before. (I have no memory of how I solved that fiasco.)

I was always in a state of anxiety wondering what I was going to miss. How was I going to screw up this time? I shudder just thinking about those days.

Using my paper calendar has put all of that anxiety about the future behind me. With it I can see into my future and make sure that I am not overbooked. Events don't take me by surprise. I meet my project deadlines. But best of all, when I get a new calendar, I first put down all of my vacation dates. I can look ahead a whole year and know when I am going to have fun!

Join the folks returning to good old reliable paper for planning and future thinking. Paper calendars changed my life and they can change yours! 🗓️

As a time-management educator, speaker, trainer and author, **Marydee Sklar** has been teaching the executive function skills of time management, planning, and organization for over 25 years. On her website, www.ExecutiveFunctioningSuccess.com, you can learn more about her services and read her blogs that are full of easy-to-use tips.

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