

Want Management (A Summary)

Instead of time management, consider managing your *wants*. Everything you do can be divided into three categories: things you need to do (to survive); things you want to do (but don't need to do); and things that you don't want and don't need to do, but do anyway. These include duties, addictions, and things that other people sometimes get you to do. (Note that some duties are things that *somebody* needs to do if we are to survive, but that others are just social duties.) All of our wants can be divided into "really-wants" (wants closely connected with our personal mission) and "it-would-be-nice-ifs," (the things that we could live without but find ourselves seeking, such as the latest product or movie.) It-would-be-nice-ifs aren't always bad. It's only when they clutter our lifestyles and interfere with us getting our needs and our really-wants met. Weeding out it-would-be-nice-ifs is a good way to have less stress and more capacity.

It also pays to realize that some of our "really-wants," are really *symbols* of what we really want, and not the reality itself. For instance, if you say you really want a big house or a lot of property, maybe you really want the security these represent. Or the money or power that some people really want is just a means to get the recognition, acceptance or attention from another person that they deep-down really want. People can waste big parts of their lives working for these symbols and end up feeling empty. So ask yourself if some of the things you are working for can be gotten more directly in other ways. For example, instead of saving for years to buy a big house, you might form many relationships that give you the emotional security that you really want.

Definitions

A "really-want" is part of your mission, something that's personally important.

An "it-would-be-nice-if" are usually things and experiences that would be nice to have or do, but they're not something that you would have thought of on your own.

A symbolic want is a material thing or experience that you want because of what it makes you feel or what it adds to your image. Some examples:

Big house → emotional security High paying job → prestige sports car → masculine
role in a play → fame and attention nice clothes → sexy or attractive

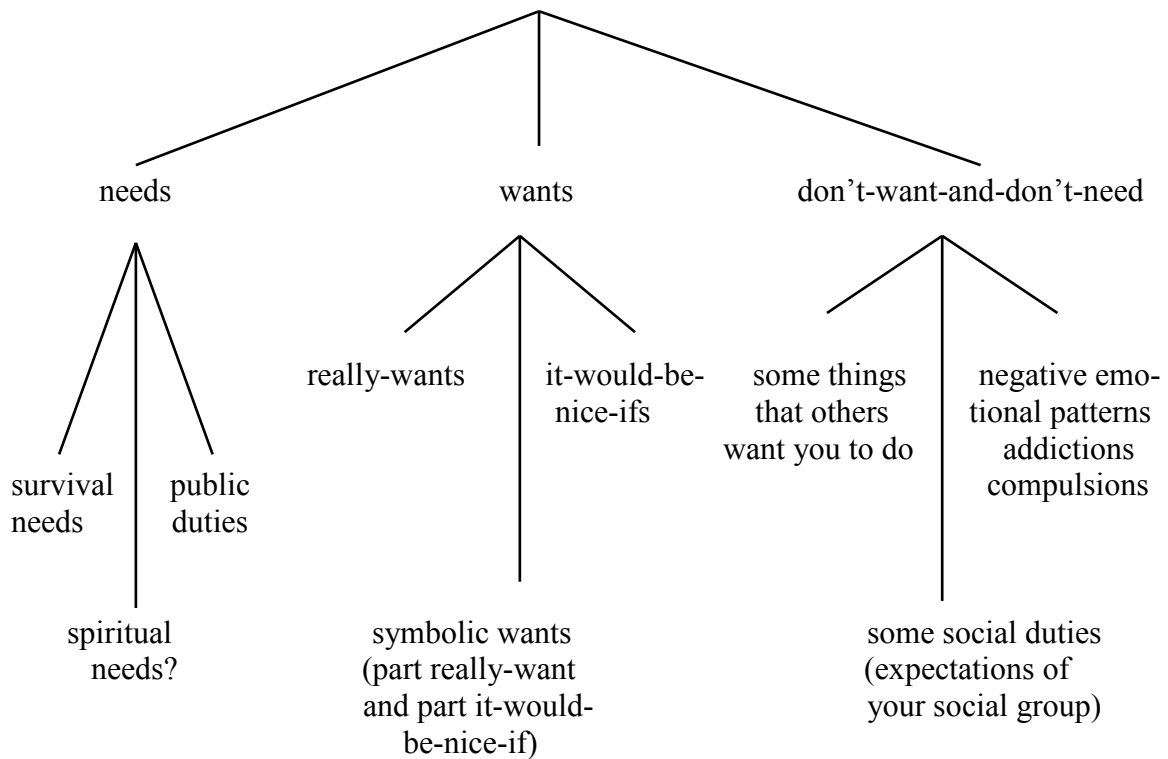
Concepts

- Address your needs first. First things first.
- Trim or cut out the it-would-be-nice-ifs so you can concentrate on your "really-wants."
- For symbolic wants, determine the genuine part, and find a more direct way to get it.

- Don't put off civic duties because everyone needs to do their share.

Want Management

All your time is spent on one of the following:



Want Management

[This article and exercise address the same two areas as the Well Analogy, but in addition, it provides you with a powerful life-management framework that you can use day by day and task by task.]

I think that the term *time management* is a misnomer and a red herring. Mention time management and right away most people think of efficiency and trying to get more things done. It occurs to me to look at things differently: to look at managing our needs, our wants, and our “don't-need-and-don't-wants.”

Here's an exercise for you to do: Each day for a week, write down everything you do that takes longer than 15 minutes. At the end of the week put each item in one of three

categories: things you need to do, things you want to do (but don't need to do), and things you don't need or want to do but do anyway. This third category includes the things others want you to do, and things that you do out of habit or addiction or a sense of duty or guilt.

1. Need management. If you need to do it, then do it. Sleep enough. Eat what you need. Some exercise is needed, right? Do you need to be with people?—then spend some time there. Do you need to work? You only *need* to work enough to meet your other needs (but try telling that to your boss!) Spiritual needs? Security needs? Self-esteem needs? Self-actualization needs? How do you know that you *need* these? Do what you need to do.

If you stopped here, doing only what you needed to do, imagine how open, restful and calm your life would be! There would be eons of time with nothing to do.

2. Want management. Divide wants into “really-wants” and “it-would-be-nice-if” wants. Really-wants are things that you were born to do or have. They're somehow part of who you are. I would divide “really wants” into two groups: ones that you can get your fill of, and ones that you can't. Ones that you can get your fill of are more natural. Maybe you really want to sing, be married, fly, paint, or travel. All of these have natural limits. But some “really wants” such as money or power don't have natural limits. You can always want more.

I suspect people don't *really* really-want these. Rather they are merely *symbols* of what people really want, not the reality itself. For instance, if you say you really want a big house or lots of property, maybe you really want the emotional security these represent. Or you say you really want money or power? Maybe it's just recognition, acceptance or attention from another person that you really want. You say you want nonstop thrills? Maybe it's intimacy that you *really* really-want.

Notice that if you stopped here, with your needs and your natural “really-wants,” how rich your life would be. I sense a rhythm: hard work to meet your needs, joy as you do your really-wants, and still a lot of time to just hang out and be present to all that is.

But as deadly as the unnatural really-wants can be, I think it is the it-would-be-nice-ifs that clutter our lives and clog our minds. Personally it-would-be-nice-if I learned Spanish, could play the guitar, saw every decent movie that came out, as well as every good TV sitcom, could make everybody I met happy, had time to garden, had time to play volleyball, racquetball, swim, travel, read novels, and write poetry, and....

But it would *not* be nice if I tried to do *all* of these. In fact, it would become very stressful very fast. And toss in a time management book and a stopwatch to try to squeeze more into each hour, and well, it would be a very sad balancing act to perform indeed.

Notice how stressed and burdened life becomes when you let in the it-would-be-nice-ifs.

TV deserves special mention here since it is loaded with it-would-be-nice-if programming. Even some of the shows that people *feel* they “really-want” to watch have little depth or long-term value. While it manipulates the viewer into a materialistic, passive and consumer mentality, its cost to you can only be accurately judged relative to the opportunities you lost—what you otherwise could have done with your life.

3. Don't-need-and-don't-want management. The things that others want you to do can be divided into two groups: things that are duties and things that aren't. Do nonduties only if it is a need or a really-want for the other person (you can ask them) and only if you really-want to do something for that person. Then it becomes a really-want for you.

Duties are actually needs in the larger sense since maintaining our mutual life-support systems is a must. In a narrow sense you don't need to recycle, or to vote, or to compensate for extra value coming to you from the third world. But now or later it will spell life or death for you or someone else, economically, environmentally, or politically. Thus it becomes a need. And personally I really-want children and adults all over the world to *keep on living*, so for me these duties are not only needs, but really-wants.

The category of don't-need-and-don't-want also includes bad habits, addictions and compulsions. In any phone book in the country, usually in the blue pages, you can find phone numbers for help. Of course that means there are actually people out there ready to do what they can, for *you*. What a shocking experience—to talk to someone who cares and thinks you're worth it!

To be thorough, I'll add just a couple things about needs. First, things that you need to do repeatedly like meal preparation or laundry ought to be streamlined so you have more time for your really-wants. Prepare more than one meal at a time, or buy a lot of one color of sock, etc. Second, I think that I would have a psychological *need* to weed the clutter out of my life on a regular basis.



Exercise:

1. First, look over your past agenda, or think back over the past few days and in writing identify each major use of time as a need, really-want, it-would-be-nice-if, duty, or don't-need-and-don't-want.
2. From this list, and from your longer range goals, make a list of the really-wants of your life.
3. Go back through your really-wants and determine if any of them are symbolic really-wants.
4. Then, if you prepare a daily list of things to do, label each item on your list as one of the five categories listed in #1.
5. As you go through your day, use the want management framework to label things before you do them. Put up written reminders or share the framework verbally with others, so that you begin to internalize it.