

An ER Doctor on HOW TO TRIAGE YOUR BUSY LIFE

How often do you describe your life as “Crazy Busy”? I’m an Emergency Room doctor, and “Crazy busy” is a phrase you will never hear me use. Here’s the truth: when you’re running around in “Crazy Busy Mode,” you’re simply harming your ability to handle the “Busy.” You can be as busy as I am as an ER doctor – without feeling “Crazy Busy.” How? Start here. And leave “Crazy Busy” behind. For more details, watch my TEDx talk, [“An ER Doctor on How to Triage Your Busy Life.”](#)

Step 1: Triage Everything On Your Mental To-Do List

Fill in the blanks below to prioritize your to-do’s. These can be big categories like “Attention to Family”, or single tasks like “write email for that major project” – however works for you. Feel free to print out multiple copies (or the extra blank lines on page 4) so you can really brain-dump everything.

RED

Definition: your most immediately important / mission critical items

General Examples.	Fill in your own
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catching up on a big work project • Taking care of a child who is sick • Top 1 “Next” step you need to reach a big project goal • Finishing writing that speech • Writing that important email 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____

YELLOW

Definition: These are tasks that support your reds, or tasks that could become a red if you don’t manage them.

General Examples	Fill in your own
<p>RECURRENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercising • Recurrent business activities (like check-in calls with a direct report, invoicing, batching social media) • Meal-planning • Planning (and doing) quality time with the family • Reviewing your Top 3 tasks and their project plans, and triaging tasks • Check email (schedule it; don’t let it take over your day!) <p>ONE-TIME</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booking travel • Addressing home repair issues • Scheduling a move • Spending a little extra time with a kiddo • Date night 	<p>RECURRENT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____ <p>ONE TIME:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____

GREEN

Definition: These are tasks that do need to be done, but they're not so mission critical that they're worth delaying your Reds/Greens. (They may feel urgent, or like "I can just get this done in 10 minutes" - but they will eat up your entire day if you don't triage them).

General Examples	Fill in your own
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Purchasing a needed item on Amazon (or doing returns on Amazon or any other online shopping)• Choosing a paint color, or other decorating decision (Dr. Darria lets her husband do this)• Make doctors appointments• Call vendors for house repairs• Checking social media messages• Purchasing toilet paper, olive oil, paper towels, diapers, printer ink, office supplies, SPF etc. (set these to auto-subscriptions so you don't have to think about them!)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____

BLACK

Definition: These are tasks that you should remove from your list. All they do is distract you from what needs to be done, and when you get down to the bottom of it, they don't fuel your Top 3. It can be tough to let go of things or say "No," but as we know in the ER, if you try to do everything, you'll never accomplish your Reds.

General Examples	Fill in your own
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leading a school fundraising event• Going to 7 birthday parties in a single day• An umpteenth meeting that you don't really need• Endless scrolling on social media (just TURN IT OFF)• Making your child's Halloween costume from scratch• Read all your spam emails (hit UNSUBSCRIBE!!)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____

Step 2: Tackle items by Triage Colour

Now that you've triaged, here's how you'll be taking care of each item. (You'll put them into action in Step 3.)

- **REDS:** BLOCK off time on your calendar to complete these over the next 5 days or put them in your day's Key 3 (Step 3).
- **YELLOWs:** Schedule these items - put the recurring items into a "repeat" schedule on your calendar. Schedule the rest or put them as your day's to-do's in today's Key 3.
- **GREENs:** Fit these in during "pockets" of time (like in carpool line, on your commute, when you have 10 minutes before your next meeting), or delegate them if you can. Or, set these to "subscriptions" or auto re-order, so they take no brainpower at all. Or delegate them to someone with the time or skills. On those days that greens seem to be the noisiest - remind yourself - That's a green. It's ok if it's not done right now. Depending on the task, (A) Fit these in during "pockets" of time (like in carpool line, on your commute, when you have 10 minutes before your next appt), (B) Set them to "subscriptions"/auto-reorder, or set as recurrent on your calendar, so they take no brainpower at all or (C) Delegate/outsouce them to someone with the time or skills.
- **BLACKs:** Cut these. Say No. Delegate. Without guilt or self-criticism.

Step 3: Turn this into Action

Take everything from Step 1 and 2, to now convert your triaged items into an action plan for each day or week. Print out this document for every day of the week, or simply write it into the day planner that you already use, to take back control of your time.

DAY: _____ DATE: ____/____/____

Today's Key 3 (Today's most important tasks - a combination of Reds and Yellows):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Other tasks to be accomplished when time allows (Yellows and Greens):

- _____
- _____
- : _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Free up brain-space: plan here for the greens that you'll put on auto-subscribe (or other automatic/recurrent plan) or delegate, and write here how you plan to say no to or delegate the blacks.

- _____
- _____
- : _____
- _____

Extra space for triaging (use this for any color where you needed more space to to-do list dump!)

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At the end of the day, look at what you accomplished. Even getting 1 of your Key 3 is a win and shows you're moving in the right direction!!! You already had the raw materials – NOW? You're READY. Remember – You've GOT this.

Now that you've triaged, [head over to my FB Group: Life Hacks to Manage the Crazy Busy](#) to post a picture of your Reds/Yellows/Greens!

Xoxo,
Dr. Darria