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How almost having a nervous breakdown changed my life

Seven months ago I read *The Four Hour Workweek* by Timothy Ferriss. It was a major turning point in my life, and fit well with several major changes I was making. I had already shifted from a work harder and longer to make more money mindset. I was looking to gain a level of freedom in my employment. I wanted the freedom to be able to work anywhere in the world and to choose my hours. All this without a drop in our standard of living. His book shifted my view and further clarified what I wanted to accomplish.

Then came the stumbling block

I was in sales and already had a great deal of freedom. I was not required to be in the office. One major obstacle down...and it caused another. To do my job I need to meet with my customers. That requires me to be in Houston. It can't be done if I spend two months in Cypress.

The other challenge was with schedule. How the heck can he get down to four hours a week? Sure, I could probably cut out 10 hours if I was focused. That makes it a 40 hour work week. 20 hours? No way!

Our solution

We decided to start a side business that would eventually replace my day job. This is easier said than done. We were determined to do this while maintaining a balanced life. That meant I couldn't let any obligations drop. Racquetball...I still played several times a week. Exercise...another daily demand. Our kid's activities...lost several more evenings. Work...I cut back to 40 hours per week but heck, I need to feed the family!

The end result was that nothing got done well. Everything was a chore. I was stressed beyond belief and no one was happy.

Snap!

Finally it all came apart. It was a case of too much to do and too little time. On top of my already busy schedule I had a major racquetball tournament that took up my entire weekend.

That doesn't mean I didn't try. Unfortunately I didn't get the critical things done, and what I did wasn't done well. My mood tanked, I couldn't sleep, and I was spinning out of control.

Calling it a nervous breakdown is a bit extreme. There were no men in white coats. I wasn't taken away in a sleeveless jacket. No rubber rooms. No medications that had me drooling and incoherent.

What did happen was my wife and I had a deep conversation that lasted into the wee hours of the morning.

And something clicked

I finally let go of my 40 hour per week mindset. I shifted to a mindset that focused on accomplishing *important* tasks. The rest just won't get done. I did some soul searching and identified the areas I valued. I assessed my job and identified the activities that were important.

Then came the hard part. I cut my work week to the important/critical 20 hours. This freed up time to do the other things I wanted to do. Build our business. Get caught up on the household repairs and upgrades (I like working with my hands). Play racquetball without feeling guilty. Watch the Pittsburgh Penguins thump the Ranges in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

The amazing thing is that I got better at everything. I started posting to this blog on a regular basis. I accomplished more at work once I ruthlessly cut all of the non-important tasks. More sales equals more commission. I had more time to work on our business. I have more time to do the things I enjoy like racquetball. And last weekend I was able to get away and had a wonderful time at the beach.

None of this was unknown

This was my latest life lesson. I believe life will keep throwing the same thing at you until you figure it out. I've known about Pareto's Law for years. I knew about goals and prioritizing my day. I knew that it didn't matter how long or hard I worked, what mattered is what I accomplished.

Knowing is one thing. Doing is another. Sometimes making the change is easy. Sometimes incremental improvement will do the job.

Sometimes it takes a crisis...or a breakdown.

You can also find this article published on [How almost having a nervous breakdown changed my life](#), and on the tag pages [Life balance](#).