

# Family Matters Nine-Part Series: MARGIN

Based on the book:

*Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* by Richard A. Swenson, M.D.

## Lesson 1

This best-seller explains what margin is, why it is important, how it disappeared, and steps to get it back. Margin is the space between our load and our limits and is related to our reserves and resilience. It is a buffer, a leeway, a gap; the place we go to heal, to relate, to reflect, to recharge our batteries, to focus on the things that matter most.

As a Christian physician and researcher, Dr. Swenson began to consistently see the effects of stress and overload to his patient's physical health. He was in private practice for 5 years, on staff as teaching faculty at a medical school and researcher on the subject for many years. He has now spoken in over 60 countries, spoken to US Senate, NASA, Medical conferences in nearly every state and numerous countries on this topic of "overload."

According to National Institutes of Health (NIH). Prolonged stress has been shown to cause numerous health problems, including:

Weakening of the immune system, making you more likely to have colds or other infections

High blood pressure

Upset stomach, ulcers and acid reflux

Anxiety

Increased rapid heart beat and heart palpitations

Panic attacks

Cardio-vascular problems

Increase in blood sugar levels

Irritable bowel problems

Backaches

Tension headaches or migraines

Sleep problems

Chronic fatigue syndrome

Respiratory problems and heavy breathing

Worsening of skin conditions, such as eczema

Tim Keller, *The Reason For God*, p.17 of the introduction, says,

"Faith without some doubts is like a body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or too indifferent to ask themselves the hard questions, will eventually find themselves defenseless against tragedy or probing questions. Their faith can collapse almost overnight if they've failed to listen to their own doubts."

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Proverbs 16:3

Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.

Psalm 118:5-6

Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free.  
The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

Matthew 4:1-10

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you, 'and

"On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

"You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Exponential Math: no wonder we are stressed:

- More video is uploaded to YouTube in 60 days than all 3 major television networks created in 60 years.
- The average American is exposed to 10 hours of media per day and watches 34 hours of television per week.
- Go to college and you can choose from over 500 baccalaureate degrees.
- The average grocery store has 40,000 different products.
- A Wal-mart Superstore has 150,000 different products.
- There are 55,000 configurations of coffee at Starbucks.
- We each must learn to operate 20,000 pieces of equipment in our lifetime.
- Knowledge workers check e-mail 50 times a day, instant messaging 77 times a day, and visit 40 websites per day.
- The average desk worker starts something new every 3 minutes.
- Apple offers 800,000 apps in its Apps Store, and 50 billion apps have been downloaded.
- Some new car owners' manuals are "more than 800 pages."
- People around the world spent a combined time of 200,000 years playing the smartphone game Angry Birds from its release in 2009 until the end of 2011.
- In 1995, no state had an obesity rate above 20%; now every state does. The state with the lowest adult obesity rate today would have had the highest rate in 1995.

Jim Collins – the story behind *Good To Great* (Top 400 books of all-time, #5 of all time in Business Management/Leadership)

Each time the New Year rolls around and I sit down to do my annual resolutions, I reflect back to a lesson taught me by a remarkable teacher. In my mid-20s, I took a course on creativity and innovation from Rochelle Myers and Michael Ray at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, and I kept in touch with them after I graduated. One day, Rochelle pointed to my ferocious work pace and said, "I notice, Jim, that you are a rather undisciplined person."

I was stunned and confused. After all, I was the type of person who carefully laid out my BHAGs (big hairy audacious goals), top three objectives and priority activities at the start of each New Year. I prided myself on the ability to work relentlessly toward those objectives, applying the energy I'd inherited from my prairie-stock grandmother.

"Your genetic energy level enables your lack of discipline," Rochelle continued. "Instead of leading a disciplined life, you lead a busy life."

She then gave me what I came to call the 20-10 assignment. It goes like this: Suppose you woke up tomorrow and received two phone calls. The first phone call tells you that you have inherited \$20 million, no strings attached. The second tells you that you have an incurable and terminal disease, and you have no more than 10 years to live. What would you do differently, and, in particular, what would you stop doing?

That assignment became a turning point in my life, and the "stop doing" list became an enduring cornerstone of my annual New Year resolutions – a mechanism for disciplined thought about how to allocate the most precious of all resources: time. Rochelle's challenge forced me to see that I'd been plenty energetic, but on the wrong things. Indeed, I was on entirely the wrong path. After graduate school, I'd taken a job at Hewlett-Packard. I loved the company, but hated the job. Rochelle's assignment helped me to see I was cut out to be a professor, a researcher, a teacher – not a businessman – and I needed to make a right-angle turn. I had to stop doing my career, so that I could find my real work. I quit HP, migrated to the Stanford Business School faculty and eventually became – with some remarkable good luck along the way – a self-employed professor, happily toiling away on my research and writing.

Rochelle's lesson came back to me a number of years later while puzzling over the research data on 11 companies that turned themselves from mediocrity to excellence, from good to great. In cataloguing the key steps that ignited the transformations, my research team and I were struck by how many of the big decisions were not what to do, but what to stop doing. In perhaps the most famous case, Darwin Smith of Kimberly-Clark – a man who had prevailed over throat cancer – said one day to his wife: "I learned something from my cancer. If you have a cancer in your arm, you've got to have the guts to cut off your own arm. I've made a decision: We're going to sell the mills."

At the time, Kimberly-Clark had the bulk of its revenues in the traditional paper business. But Smith began asking three important questions: Are we passionate about the paper business? Can we be the best in the world at it? Does the paper business best drive our economic engine?

The answers came up: no, no and no.

And so, Smith made the decision to stop doing the paper business – to sell off 100 years of corporate history – and throw all the resulting resources into the consumer business (building brands such as Kleenex), which came up yes, yes and yes to the same questions.

The start of the New Year is a perfect time to start a stop doing list and to make this the cornerstone of your New Year resolutions, be it for your company, your family or yourself. It also is a perfect time to clarify your three circles, mirroring at a personal level the three questions asked by Smith:

**1) What are you deeply passionate about?**

**2) What are you genetically encoded for – what activities do you feel just "made to do"?**

**3) What makes economic sense – what can you make a living at?**

Those fortunate enough to find or create a practical intersection of the three circles have the basis for a great work life.

Think of the three circles as a personal guidance mechanism. As you navigate the twists and turns of a chaotic world, it acts like a compass. Am I on target? Do I need to adjust left, up, down, right? If you make an inventory of your activities today, what percentage of your time falls outside the three circles?

If it is more than 50%, then the stop doing list might be your most important tool. The question is: Will you accept good as good enough, or do you have the courage to sell the mills?

Looking back, I now see Rochelle Myers as one of the few people I've known to lead a great life, while doing truly great work. This stemmed largely from her remarkable simplicity. A simple home. A simple schedule. A simple frame for her work.

Rochelle spoke to me repeatedly about the idea of "making your life a creative work of art." A great piece of art is composed not just of what is in the final piece, but equally important, what is not. It is the discipline to discard what does not fit – to cut out what might have already cost days or even years of effort – that distinguishes the truly exceptional artist and marks the ideal piece of work, be it a symphony, a novel, a painting, a company or, most important of all, a life.

