



The 10-10-10 Rule

One tool (or rule) we can use was invented by Suzy Welch, a business writer for publications such as *Bloomberg Businessweek* and *O* magazine. It's called 10/10/10, and Welch describes it in a book of the same name. To use 10/10/10, we think about our decisions on three different time frames:

- How will we feel about it 10 minutes from now?
- How about 10 months from now?
- How about 10 years from now?

N.B. We can also apply the rule in other 10/10/10 measurements e.g. 10 hours from now, ten days from now, ten weeks from now etc.

Today, the world offers us more options than ever before, but it also forces us to juggle more priorities, to make more choices, and to make them faster. The result: a crisis of doing too much, or not enough, and making our decisions based on impulse, stress or guilt. In 10-10-10 Suzy Welch offers an effective strategy that will help you make the right decision in any situation, at work or at home; with colleagues, family or friends. The rule is deceptively simple: when faced with a decision, consider what the consequences and outcomes of your various options would be in 10 minutes, 10 months, and 10 years. But the results are extraordinary. Using the framework of 10-10-10 will allow you to think through your decisions and to match them with the expectations and values you hold dearest. Most importantly, it allows you to chart a path in the direction you want, and to head confidently towards it with focus, perspective, balance, and joy.

Interview with Suzy Welch

Back in my 20s, when I was still trying to figure out how to do it all—the perfect mother/good wife/successful career woman/happy homemaker thing—I happened to be seated next to a kindly older gentleman at a dinner party. In the course of small talk, he mentioned that he came from a family with 11 children. At the time, I had one toddler and was hanging on by my fingernails.

"How, how, *how*," I practically cried, "did your mother do it?"

The man's eyes crinkled up; he'd heard the question before.

"Well, my dear, those were simpler days," he said gently. "After my mother finished the breakfast dishes, she started making lunch."

"*Oh, come on!*" I wanted to scream, "*Give me the magic formula!*"

As if he'd heard my thoughts, the man added, "Don't worry. Everything will sort itself out eventually."

How old-fashioned he seemed. How wise he turned out to be.

Which is not to say I've cracked the do-it-all problem at the ripe old age of 46. There is no foolproof way to manage something as untidy as life, and I still have days when I feel as if I am juggling eggs on a roller coaster. But I have—over a decade of tinkering and practice—devised a method, for lack of a better word, to help me balance my multiple life roles and navigate the daily dilemmas of an overstuffed existence.

I call it 10-10-10.

Here's how it works. Every time I find myself in a situation where there appears to be no solution that will make everyone happy, I ask myself three questions:

What are the consequences of my decision in 10 minutes?

In 10 months?

And in 10 years?

The answers usually tell me what I need to know not only to make the most reasoned move but to explain my choice to the family members, friends, or co-workers who will feel its impact.

I've used 10-10-10 to make some of the most meaningful decisions in my life—my divorce, for one. But the effectiveness of 10-10-10 crept up on me when I started using it on a much smaller scale.

The first time was a typical weekday. Dropping the kids off at school on the way to work, I promised that I would definitely, absolutely see them at dinner so we could do homework together and watch our favourite TV show. I also promised our babysitter the evening off.

At 5 P.M., of course, a crisis erupted at the office. During this period, I was hoping for a promotion, so walking out the door with my boss's hands wrapped around my ankle seemed particularly ill-advised. I called home to test the waters. The babysitter nearly burst into tears when I mentioned staying late. Two of the kids were fighting, and one was sulking for an unknown reason. (The other was still at swimming

practice, thank God.) My daughter grabbed the phone and put in her two cents: "You love work more than us."

My gut was all over the place—go, stay, go—and that's when 10-10-10 was officially born. I slowed my thought process down and systematically began to pick it apart. "What exactly," I asked myself, "were the immediate repercussions of staying at work versus rushing home?"

If I stayed, my boss would jot it down in her little book of good deeds, and my children and babysitter would turn purple. If I rushed home, my boss would get someone else to help her, and my triumphant arrival at the front door would be greeted with the usual grunts and sighs, and probably a demand for the latest video game or some exciting new shampoo.

In 10 months? Assuming I didn't make staying late a daily feature of our lives (which I knew I wouldn't), the kids would be fine. As for the babysitter, she would be back at school, and I would be but a distant memory. At work, though, if I left, my boss might start to question my commitment and my availability, not the impression I was eager to encourage.

In 10 years, the fact that I worked late (or not) would be irrelevant. My career would be someplace I couldn't foresee. The babysitter would be working on Wall Street. And my kids would love or hate me for reasons much bigger than one late night at the office.

And so I stayed without flinching. I got my gold star at work, and the home-front grumbles faded as anticipated.

The second time I used 10-10-10, the ante was higher. I'd been asked to run a Saturday meeting for the company's executives—a big deal in terms of exposure. Unfortunately, the meeting fell on the same day my son went for his junior black belt in karate, a test that was four gruelling years in the making.

Again, I ran through the time frames.

In 10 minutes, both choices stank. My son would be devastated. I could picture his sweet face all screwed up and turning pink as he fought back tears; he was the kind of kid who got sad, not mad. My boss obviously wouldn't cry, but her disappointment would surely be palpable.

In 10 months, I figured, the pain would be buried. Why? Because I would shovel frantically to make it so. If I attended the off-site, I would love my son extravagantly in the months that followed, spoil him with my attention, and apologize until he could stand it no more. If I didn't go, I would pull the same kind of performance at work,

with my boss at the receiving end.

But 10 years...there was the problem. My kids would be gone and my career at full-throttle, whether I had gotten one promotion or not. But on some visceral level, my son would still know that I had chosen to miss one of the seminal events of his life for my own advancement.

That was damage I could never undo.

So I skipped the off-site. And late that Saturday afternoon, I cheered as my son received his black belt, his face pink as he tried to hold back tears.

About a year later, 10-10-10 changed my life.

Like many marriages, mine took a long time to come apart. The stakes of doing something—that is, ending it for real—seemed unbearably high: the children, the friends, the house, the backyard barbecues. And so we waited, and waited, for something to unfreeze us—a decision, one way or another.

One spring morning, I stole away from work and family, and hiked to the top of a mountain about an hour north of Boston. I needed the time and silence to work this tangled problem through. The 10-minute question came first, and it was painfully easy to answer—divorce meant chaos and despair all around. In 10 months, the mess would surely be worse, what with the upheaval, and lawyers, too. All I could think was, "Awful, awful, awfulness—not just in 10 months, in 20, and maybe more." In 10 years, though—in 10 wonderful years—we would have our lives back, of that I was certain. Different lives, but honest ones, free of unhappiness, uncertainty, and pretending.

That night, after a long talk about how things would unfold over the coming days, months, and years, my husband and I agreed we'd found a shared reason—and a road map—to say goodbye.

Using 10-10-10 in a divorce situation is at the extreme end of the spectrum, but over the past few years, my friends and family have borrowed it to wrestle with dilemmas of all sizes.

A woman I know, for instance, used 10-10-10 to help her resolve a difficult situation with an old friend. Lori and Sarah (let's call them) roomed together in college and, soon after, married men who got along so well that the couples came to spend many Saturdays together. Eventually, however, Sarah divorced and remarried a man that Lori and her husband found unbearably sarcastic.

A year of awkwardness ensued, as Lori made every kind of excuse to avoid get-

together. When Sarah finally stopped calling, Lori wondered if it was time to let the relationship go. She turned to 10-10-10 to determine what to do next.

Lori predicted that the 10-minute and 10-month consequences of ending the relationship would feel something like the death of a friend who had been very ill. There would be sorrow—but also a mitigating portion of relief. In 10 years, though, those feelings would be gone, replaced by regret. That was an outcome she couldn't accept. The only option, then, was to tell Sarah the truth and ask her to consider returning to the one-on-one friendship of their college days.

She knew that the immediate consequences of that conversation could be irreparable harm: no more friendship and an ugly wound, too. But if they could survive one tough talk, Lori figured, they had decades of good times ahead of them. The conversation was not easy, but the friendship's history carried them through it. Today, Lori says, "We both feel grateful that we didn't lose it all."

Another friend of mine finds herself using 10-10-10 to get through the patches of second-guessing that occasionally interrupt a life she loves but never planned on. Fifteen years ago, she was a sales representative for a pharmaceutical company. She loved the job, and the job loved her. The first in her family to attend college, she was looking forward to a long and successful corporate career.

Then came marriage and two children. My friend tried to keep working, but one day, when she returned from a week on the road, the nanny put her son in her arms, and he didn't recognize her. She quit, telling herself she would go back the minute she could.

That minute never came. She has three children now, the youngest a baby.

"The other day, I was cleaning the refrigerator and Sammy was crying his head off, and inside I was screaming, "What have I done?" she told me recently. "10-10-10 reminded me."

Both the 10-minute and 10-year scenarios made her shudder. "Short term, I'm looking at a lot of diapers and spit up," she said, "and long term, I'm seeing a big black hole. Kids gone, but so is my career."

But, she says, "for me it's all about the time in between. When Sammy catches a ball, and Emma has her first flute recital, and Alex starts to shave, I'll be there. I gave up one dream, but I got a reality I couldn't walk away from."

Incidentally, this friend introduced her sister to 10-10-10, and she recently wrote me about her own twist to the method. It's important, she said, to make sure you're not basing too many decisions on any particular time frame. "If I'm responding to the 10-

minute consequences, I'm probably living too impulsively," she explained.

A graduate student who heard me speak about 10-10-10 at Harvard not long ago questioned how much the process could help her. "I think your method works," she said, "only if you already know what you want from life." She said that 10-10-10 helped me realize I should go to my son's karate test because I valued being a good mother more than career success.

I told her that knowing your priorities may help you with the 10-10-10 process, but it can also help you discover them. Using 10-10-10 to sort out my divorce, for example, helped me learn that I valued living authentically more than living the "perfect picture" for all to see.

Speaking of pictures, I recently came across one of myself in an old photo album, taken just about the time of my conversation with that kindly man at the dinner party. Baby on hip, phone to ear—I look distracted, to say the least.

My face is different now. It's aged more than a little, that's for sure. But the anxiety is gone. Without a doubt, there are a couple of good reasons for that (no more babies on hips, for one). Still, I know that the three questions of 10-10-10 played a large part over the years. They had the uncanny ability to help me slow my life down and make it my own. Today, at least most of the time, my face wears a look of, well, I guess it is a happy calm. It's a look, in fact, that might even say something old-fashioned like "Don't worry. Everything will sort itself out in the end."

http://www.amazon.co.uk/10-10-10-Life-Transforming-Idea-Suzy-Welch/dp/1847394493/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=undefined&sr=8-1&keywords=10+10+10+welch
