

Do You Have Time to Be Reasonable?

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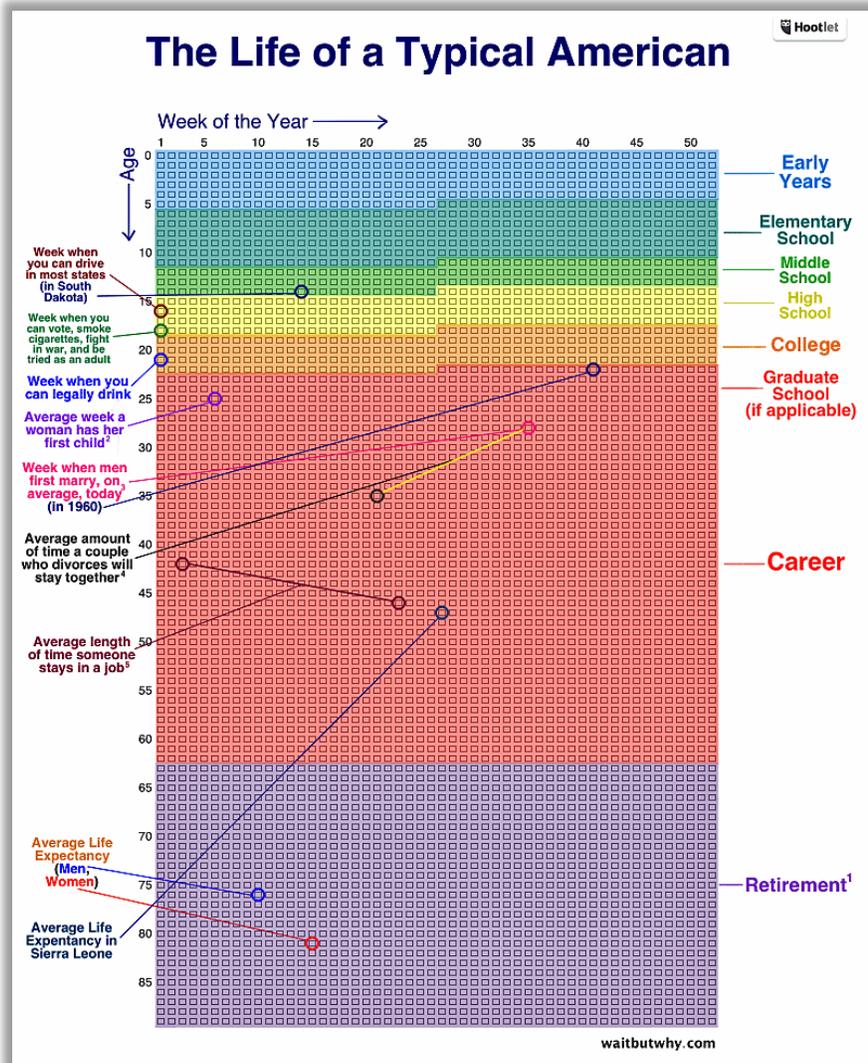


Figure 1 Example "Weeks" Chart from WaitButWhy.com

Fitting goals into time available can be like fitting a big butt into skinny jeans. Is the effort worth the result?

Writers are genuine, pie-in-the-sky optimists. They believe that their subconscious minds house at least one or two stunning best-sellers. I've been a member of this hopeful group since the sixth grade. Each article I write is a stepping stone toward my personal "50 Shades of Grey" blockbuster novel (except my book will be well written).

Recently I've noticed a subtle shift in my reliable optimism. It has grown more—for lack of a better word--*reasonable*. There's less urgency, more comfort with the way things are.

Hmmm.

Charting Life is a Reality Check

Four months ago, I surfed into a website called [Wait But Why](#). It's a playful, practical take on productivity and time management. One of the authors, [Tim Urban](#), wrote an [excellent post](#) containing three different charts. The charts depicted a 90-year lifespan in years, months, and weeks, respectively. There's a big laminated version the Weeks chart on sale for 20 bucks.

It seemed like a cool idea so I started gathering colorful pens.

Urban suggested using his Weeks chart to diagram life accomplishments. Color-shaded blocks should represent periods of time that can be dotted with notable events and experiences. Figure 1 at the start of the article shows an example displayed on his website.

It seemed like a cool idea so I ordered a chart and began collecting colorful pens. When my package finally arrived, I pulled the chart from the mailing tube, stretched it over the dining room table, and gazed with wonder at the possibilities.

It took about 60 seconds for me to become completely overwhelmed. I simply rolled the chart back into the tube, shoved it in the closet, and spent the next hour watching a disaster documentary on Netflix.

That was before the election.

The morning after election day, in a pique of god-knows-what, I fished the chart from the closet and again stretched it across the table. This time I grabbed my pens and set to work dragging long rows of color left to right. I used blue for time passed and green for time ahead.

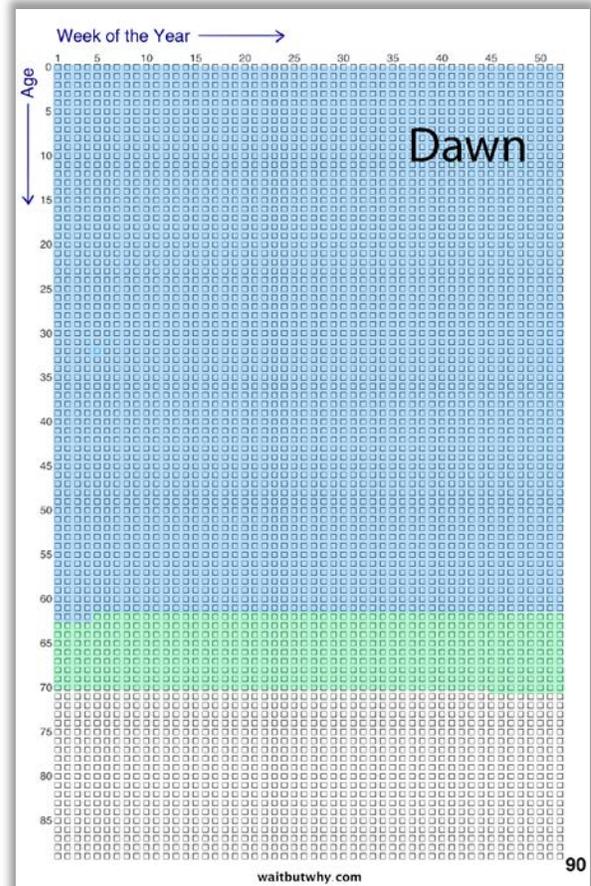


Figure 2 Dawn's Chart

The green pen went dry at row 70 but I was Ok with that. It even seemed weirdly appropriate. At 70 I'll be retired and living on—guess what?—proceeds from my best seller. It's a big white block of party time.

Then I took a step back and really looked at the diagram. (See Figure 2 above.) There was an 8-to-1 size difference between the blue area and the green area. My green working future

appeared to be a thin band at the bottom of long blue lifespan already spent. It was astonishing –and not in a good way.

There's Always More Time

In my earlier years, I delayed writing the book of books so my career could take precedence. Later when I shifted into motherhood, there was no time to write much of anything. I started working part time as the kids grew older but the few remaining hours of the day were spent kayaking with my husband.

Then life threw me a gigantic curve ball.



My mate decided to start a new relationship with someone across the country. I had to scramble to make ends meet. It was a difficult transition but I clung to the dream of that best seller. My book gave me energy and hope.

There's NOT Always More Time

All my life I've known that-- given the proper focus and worth ethic -- I'd eventually produce one or more fabulously successful books. I often questioned my capricious resolve but I never once questioned the reality of those books. That is, not until I saw the green band.

[Tim Urban](#) understood my reaction. "It kind of feels like our lives are made up of a countless number of weeks," he writes. "But there they are [on the chart -ed] —fully countable—staring you in the face."

Clearly I had to do something dramatic so I grabbed the car keys and drove to my first experience of a Washington State marijuana shop. Oy.

This morning I was finally ready to face the chart again. I propped it up next to the piano and kettle bells. I'm looking at it right now. My reasonable nature assures me that there's still time to write and enjoy life. *I just need to be more realistic.*

Reasonable Thinking, Reasonable Results

I'm an optimist, remember? That damn best-seller is Numero Uno on an already overflowing bucket list of goals. If I try to cram my magnum opus into a thin green band, the result may be catastrophic — a giant butt squeezed into skinny jeans.

It's like I'm living a real-life adaptation of the classic two-wolves parable. My version goes like this:

There are two hungry optimistic wolves living in my back yard. One wolf is a pleasant, reasonable new tenant. An accountant. The other wolf has been my companion since the 6th grade. She's demanding and wild, howling at the moon, eyes filled with stars.

Given that green band, which wolf should I feed?



Dawn Groves helps leaders and teams sharpen their communication skills, collaborate more effectively, and manage workplace stress.

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