

Feature Article

Making Peace with Time

by Sandi Corbitt-Sears, StaffingU Director of Communication

Time. We can't see it, touch it, hear it, or taste it. But, in many ways, time rules our lives. Time -- or the perceived lack of it -- is the root cause of much of our stress. We seem to be locked in a battle of wills with the passage of time, convinced it's moving too quickly or too slowly to suit our needs.

In reality, time doesn't move at all. We do the moving and, as far as we know, we all move through time at a constant speed. Only in our minds does time appear to move at an inconvenient pace.

But that's very good news. If the movement of time is a product of our perception, we can change it. Time itself won't be affected, of course, but what we experience as we pass through it can change dramatically. And all it takes is a fresh viewpoint. Here are ten suggestions to get you started:

1. Lose your watch.

I took my watch off in 1993 and haven't worn one since. Oh, I have clocks around my home and office. And my cell phone is always with me if I really need to check the time. It has been very liberating not to have time ticking away on my wrist. Try losing your watch for a week and see if your concept of time changes.

2. Underschedule your day.

Pick a day next week and underschedule it. Put on your task list only what you believe you can get done by noon. Those tasks will probably take much longer than half a day, but you'll feel less pressured.

3. Underpromise your time.

One of the greatest time pressures comes from promising a chunk of your time to someone else. Client appointments, candidate interviews, commitments, and events require us to be somewhere and/or do something at a particular time. Because we've promised to donate that piece of time, it's no longer ours. We've given it away.

That's wonderful if it's given freely and for a worthwhile purpose, but what about all those commitments we feel are forced upon us? Resolve the issue by saying "no" more often. Promise less than you think you can -- or should. In fact, go out on a limb and declare promises of time to be forbidden for a week.

4. Work ahead.

When you anticipate that something will need to be done in the future, don't wait until the last few days (or hours) to begin. Start on it as soon as you have a few extra minutes. Once you begin, the project may flow so comfortably that you'll finish it ahead of schedule. And that is a very good feeling!

5. Experience now.

Most of us live in the future, in a world that doesn't yet exist. But we don't let that bother us as we dutifully plan and schedule and project ourselves into a future time that we've created in our minds. This behavior is encouraged through goal setting and visualization. And there's certainly nothing wrong with setting and pursuing goals or in visualizing an ideal future...as long as you also live right now, in the present.

Experiencing "now" is more difficult than it sounds. It's worth the effort, however. The more you're able to live in the moment, the less worried you'll be about what the future might bring. As a matter of fact, the most satisfying way to live might be as a series of present moments, one after the other.

6. Check your internal clock.

Can you close your eyes and accurately estimate when five minutes have elapsed? Give it a try.

How did you do? Most of us are off the mark the first time we try this because we have a distorted sense of time. That's why when we say, "Just a minute," it's likely to be far longer than 60 seconds. Developing an accurate sense of the passage of time is more than just an interesting exercise. With practice, it can help free you from dependence on clocks, watches, and Palm Pilots...and decrease your stress level.

7. Double your estimate.

When you plan a project, set aside to time fill orders, or schedule an appointment, estimate how long you think it will take. Then double that estimate. If you do this faithfully, you could eliminate deadline pressure altogether.

8. Reverse your priorities.

One day a week, work on the less important items first. For me, those are the "C" items. "A's" are must-do items. "B's" are important, but not urgent. "C" is assigned to everything else. Thank-you notes, writing an old friend, and frivolous (but fun) activities tend to be relegated to the low-priority "C" list. The list gets quite lengthy since people seldom work their way through to the "C's." By turning your priority system upside down every so often, you'll be able to clear some of the C's from your list and potentially gain a lot of satisfaction.

9. Do nothing.

Spend one day a month doing nothing or, at least, spend it doing nothing productive or competitive. Give yourself a break from the breakneck speed of life. Sleep. Contemplate the sky. Meditate. Read something fun, but useless. Spend quiet time with your family. Time will take on a whole new meaning.

10. Focus on the big picture.

It's so easy to get lost in the details of our days that we forget why we're doing all this rushing around. Didn't it all start with wanting to create a fulfilling life for ourselves and our family? Wasn't happiness supposed to be in there somewhere, as well? Perhaps you also believe that your life should

serve a purpose. So, as you move through time, re-focus your attention on what really matters in life and let the details take care of themselves.

Sandi Corbitt-Sears is Director of Communication for StaffingU, the leader in providing relationship-building techniques guaranteed to grow your business. For information on StaffingU's programs and services, including TeleClasses (live telephone-based classes), Virtual StaffingU (web-based courses), individual and group coaching, on-site training and speaking, and consulting visit www.StaffingU.net or call 866-SU-WORKS (789-6757).

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200 2nd Avenue South, #231
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

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