

Time out

Bring sanity to your hectic lifestyle

After my last column about the crazy pace of life in some business organizations, I received a few e-mails and phone calls from readers asking me, "OK, how do we break out of this frenetic habit of racing through our days?"

One meeting planner asked me to speak at a conference and include in my presentation some concrete direction for doing just that.

So, for this issue, I am offering mechanisms for setting your own pace. If your intention is to make this change, and you employ these mechanisms, you will get results.

In the end, it is all about time. We talk about time as if it were a commodity. "When I have more time..." "I'm out of time." "I'm short of time." "To save time..."

Actually time is more like a river in which we move, gracefully or frantically. Long ago, the Mayans revered time and to track it, created a 5,000-year calendar that expires in 2012. Prior to that, to track time, a person might notice changes in his image by looking in a pond, or follow the cycles of the moon. Sundials and eventually clocks were invented, and now you probably have nearly 100 time-trackers in your possession. Time is shouting or murmuring to you from your computer, phone, oven, car, television — everything has a clock on it!

Remember the times in your life when you've felt the exhilaration of time standing still? Not so easy any more.

So, to discover your own best pace, as I've suggested, is more difficult than it used to be. We do, however, need to find our own natural rhythm. Just because this

hurried pace is all around us doesn't mean it is natural. Struggling against your natural pace creates anxiety. When I feel that anxiety, I think it is my soul saying, "Please stop! This is not who I am!"

Drumming up a healthy, self-centered attitude is the place to start. Spend some time alone reflecting on past experiences when your body, mind and spirit felt in harmony. Remember times when your mind was quiet — not cluttered with worry, plans, have-to's. The memories that will float into your consciousness are delightful souvenirs of time spent well, not squandered. The answer to all of us who are starved for time is not more time.

There is one answer only — the experience of meaning. During your healthy, self-centered reflections, you will invite memories of truly living your own life at your own pace. I feel like a dolphin when I do that. I feel like a squirrel when I'm running around shackled to an impossible schedule. Look deeply in the mirror and see yourself clearly. Decide on the pace that fits you and make that the living room of your life.

Another mechanism for sanity is to make sure you have open space scheduled every day. I say "scheduled" because we must consciously choose open time or something will invariably fill it up.

There are time bandits everywhere. One of my clients closes his office door and works on a jigsaw puzzle for about 20 minutes every day. Another client walks to the river and sits on a bench in the sun and eats lunch. Open space can be a few minutes staring out your window.

Craig Allan Bond said that during this open time, in this sacred space, "the inner workings of your psyche and the

creativity of your spirit will spill ideas, insights, and beauty onto the canvas of your conscience." We yearn for this sweetness of time. T.S. Eliot said it well: "Except for the point, the still point, There would be no dance. And there is only the dance."

I can't write about pacing without once again talking about the restful, silent state of meditation. Sitting quietly and giving attention to one thing, most easily the breath, reduces the adverse effects of stress. It is the exact opposite of the flight or fight response. The psychological and physiological benefits are well documented. There are resources aplenty if you want help getting started.

An essential mechanism is to decide that you are going to be present in your life, to be still enough to notice "the unintended humor of everyday reality" as Steve Allen described it. At work and at home, your channels are open to really hear, see and feel what is going on with colleagues and family. Why should you cheat yourself out of that?

When you show up and are truly present, you take in the sensual feast all around you. Charles Kuralt was asked how he kept bringing deep pleasure to so many of us, Sunday after Sunday. He said, "You have to hear the music."

What I want for you is a pace that allows you to hear the music.



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