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Time for Everything

TIME is the raw material of life. Every day unwraps itself like a gift, bringing us the opportunity to spin a fabric of health, pleasure, and content, and to evolve into something better than we are at its beginning.

Success is contingent upon our effective use of the time given us. Whether we succeed in making time for everything we wish to do depends upon the urgency with which we tackle the job. It is fruitless and joyless to complain that our days are short if we act as though there would be no end of them.

The end of a year, like the end of a day, is not a time for melancholy brooding. The year has been long enough for all that was to be done in it. The flowers grew and blossomed, the fruit filled out and ripened, wild creatures fulfilled, in their allotted way, their destiny. Only man feels forlorn at the dying of a year and jubilant because a new year brings him another chance to fulfil his hopes for himself.

The gift of time brings no magic with it. It is only made available. We must study how to get the most out of the passing days.

This learning is an individual thing, but there are some basic tools and ideas of management that can help us. Here are three undeniable facts: (1) Time can be measured, therefore apportioned; (2) time is always passing, and it never returns; (3) time can be wasted, just as we waste materials, money and energy.

Every passing instant is a juncture of many roads open to our choice. Shall we do this or that; go this way or that? We cannot stand still. Choosing between alternatives in the use of time is evidence of one of the highest attributes of humanity: freedom of will.

What is time?

To us as individuals time is the essence of our being; to the clock it is a measured interval; to the nurse it is a pulse record; to the engineer of conservation dams it

is a sedimentation rate. A philosopher may think of it as the past increasing by diminution of the future.

Geologists and physicists compute their accounts in millions of years. Astronomical sums of time are so great that they stagger our imagination. The most powerful telescopes reveal objects so distant that we see not what is happening now but what was happening hundreds of millions of years ago.

These immense spaces of time, stretching from mist to mist of our knowledge, may seem irrelevant to our day-to-day problem, but they serve to point up the need to make the most of the little speck of time that is ours. Time is the most precious of all things to those who seek to do things, to enjoy life, to prepare today for better achievement tomorrow.

We are now given longer individual time in which to improve and advance than our forefathers had. In the past half century the expectation of life in western countries has been lengthened by twenty years. The work week has been reduced from sixty hours to forty. Over a working lifetime of 45 years, these add up to a gain of almost 40 years of time in which to do what we wish.

How we spend our time has several applications to our health. Restiveness and nervous haste make us discontented and sick. We must pay interest at a high rate if we compel time to give fruit in advance of the harvest season. We should not demand of life the performance of hopes and aspirations which only the passage of time will ripen.

There are some kinds of disease in which time is the great physician. Restoration of health is possible only by letting the complaint run its natural course. If the sufferer is impatient, and, while he is still affected, insists that he is completely well, time will grant the loan and the complaint may be shaken off, but lifelong weakness and misery may be the interest paid on it.

We are sometimes made fretful by the sensation of the slowness of time's passing when we are ill. A scientist made this test: when a patient had influenza, he asked her several times during two days of fever to count sixty at the rate she estimated as one per second. On every occasion she took less than one minute to complete the sixty count, and the higher her temperature the sooner she completed the total. When her temperature returned to normal, her rate of counting was about right. The same chemical process in our bodies may account for a manager's exasperation at the seemingly long time it takes his clerk to find a file, or the mother's irritation when her call to dinner seems to be slowly responded to.

About wasting time

Time is an asset which we cannot lightly afford to waste. The habit of wasting it is like a sullen weed, spreading greedily over our lives. Ten wasted minutes a day add up to a work week and a half in the course of a year.

What is "waste time"? One may think of it as waking hours that are spent neither in work nor in play. It may show itself in prattling idly, in staring at nothing, in stalling before beginning a task.

Many of us waste time in deciding trifles, in explaining why we have not yet got around to doing things, and in doing useless things. It is said that Pietro Medici once employed Michael Angelo to make a statue out of snow, a frivolous waste of great talent.

Habit and custom lure us into many wasteful practices. It seems that most business men read their letters before settling down to the important challenges of the day. They use up their freshest hour in routine. Why not apply that unfaded hour to constructive activity directed toward some significant accomplishment?

On the other hand, time may be saved by forming proper habits. By making routine doings as habitual and automatic as possible we give our minds time to explore and deal with important things.

We are, in our civilization, dominated by clocks. We have invented wheels that go around, and our lives are ruled by their revolution. We are so busy keeping up with the pendulum that we have no time to consider intelligently the great new developments taking place in the world.

When we pause to think of the implications of time in our lives, of the worried expressions on the faces of people reading time-tables, of the wrath of a homeward bound worker when a bus is late, of the crowding around elevators at 8:57 every morning; we realize the big part of the torment of modern existence that is caused by our feeling of the pressure of time.

The old grandfather clock ticked loudly and lazily, as if it had time to spare, but modern clocks, clicking

diligently, seem to say always: "Time to get busy at something."

About making time

The problem of making time for everything you wish to do cannot be tossed into the tray on your desk marked "pending" and left there. If time has been slipping away from you, the first step in reformation is an honest and thorough examination of the condition to be reformed. That means looking closely into your present pattern of using time.

One way to start is with the old familiar tools, pencil and paper. At the end of every day for a while — until you are sure you have all the necessary facts — jot down everything you did, trivial or important. This profile of the day will show very quickly where you are losing time.

Set deadlines for things you want to get done. The need for meeting deadlines has turned many an average newspaper reporter into an ace writer. It shows him that he can work under pressure. It demonstrates that in the heat of straining toward a point in time that cannot be overstepped his mind works with greater power. The challenge channels his energy.

In so far as time comes under our control, high on the list of the causes of waste time is poor planning. Basic in our effort to make the most of our days should be these four rules: have in mind what is next to be done; attack the task decisively; resume work readily after an interruption, and forge ahead steadily to the end of the job.

It will help to dispose of certain tasks if we make our motions faster. This is not a matter of driving ourselves, but of working efficiently so as to save time and make way for other things. We work more contentedly and use less effort when we do things briskly.

The only way to defeat the tyranny of time and bring any kind of excellence to our use of it is to break down the barriers of inertia, bad planning and hazy objectives. Get rid of things. Work should go across a bench or desk or kitchen counter. It should be disposed of at once. When bench or desk or counter becomes a storage place for things, you clutter your subconscious so that you slow down.

Making a schedule

Try making a timed schedule to span two hours, and then put yourself under orders to carry it through. For example, choose two hours on a Saturday. Plan to clear out your home desk drawers or a clothes closet: allow half an hour. Then to paste the vacation snapshots in an album: another half hour. All the door knobs in the house rattle, so set aside twenty minutes to visit them with a screwdriver. Take a ten minute coffee break. Magazines and newspapers have been piling up unread: spend half an hour in scanning them — not reading

them, but "kangarooing" through them — to determine what publications are worth keeping for perusal, and throw out the rest. In two hours you have completed four tasks that have been nagging at the back of your mind.

Rigid scheduling of a whole day is not always possible, or even desirable, but a few days lived by a timetable now and again will refresh our sense of the value of time and show us what we can expect of ourselves when we do not waste time.

Dispose of the important tasks at once, and lay aside only the expendable things. Have a file folder, if you like, labelled "Some Day". Put into it promissory notes made out to yourself listing your wishful thinking, and date them "When I get around to it." This will leave your mind free to cope with the things that must be done, and, who knows, your plan of organization may enable you to cash a note once in a while.

Foresight is a major factor in time control. It gives you freedom in planning your actions so as to take fullest advantage of time. To choose time is to save time, because a thing done when it should be done is better done, and it is put out of the way with dispatch.

Organization is a potent aid toward making the best of your time. Benjamin Franklin had a precept: "Let all your things have their places: let each part of your business have its time."

Disorder is the eternal enemy of efficient use of time. Don't allow yourself to get into the habit, so very common, of picking up papers or tools and laying them down without disposing of them. Not only does it waste time, but it breeds the impression of difficulty.

Most of us indulge in this form of dissipation to some extent. We yield to indolence but maintain a semblance of work for the sake of quieting our conscience.

Getting started

Once the need is known — get busy! Or, in the more measured language of the King in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: ". . . that we would do, we should do when we would." Another king, Frederick I, rose before dawn so that he had a longer day in which to enjoy being king.

A common source of unhappiness is the habit of putting off living to some fictional future date. Men and women are constantly making themselves unhappy because in deferring their lives to the future they lose sight of the present and its opportunities for rich living.

Procrastination is the greatest obstacle to achievement, and one of the most common human failings. It is a vice which must be conquered by anyone seeking to be happy.

By putting off until tomorrow the things we should do today, we face a double burden of duties. The thought of having more to do than we have time or strength to do persuades us to do nothing, and the

burdens continue to pile up until they seem like mountains. We lose our tempers, indulge in tears or tantrums, or collapse in headaches and illness.

The pity of it is that our reasoning power tells us that we cannot escape by these tricks. It is vain to hope that the tasks will disappear if we ignore them. Eventually, after mental anguish, we have to roll up our sleeves and do them.

To get down to work at once is a good efficiency habit. Whatever is to be done can only be done adequately by the help of a certain zest. We need to develop, and to keep on developing, interests, and to touch life at the greatest possible number of points. Perhaps interest may be aroused by the simple exercise of trying something new every week.

The innovations need not be big. The pulse of life is often felt in its trivialities. Put together, the new things we do are like a string of beads, many-coloured lenses which paint the world their own hue, providing variety and interest. The man with zest will live more in one hour than another in two, thus truly making time.

Odd moments, like little things, add up quickly. When we count the blank spaces in our time we are likely to be embarrassed. Some are unavoidable, but many are the outcome of unpreparedness. Most of us, if caught in a traffic jam, for example, fret and fume: Noel Coward took a piece of paper from his pocket and wrote his popular song, "I'll See You Again."

To be prepared with little bits of things to do is to make sure of filling in the gaps, thus using all the time we have. It is not wise to wait for long uninterrupted periods. John Erskine said that he started pressing the odd five minutes into use. In every five minutes he wrote a hundred words or so. The result was his best-selling novel, *Helen of Troy*. Einstein had a dull, routine job in Switzerland, with many idle moments. Instead of visiting other office-holders, he spent that spare time in developing the first of his papers on relativity. A salesman, kept waiting by a prospective customer, used the time to telephone other prospects making appointments.

We can watch for little chunks of time — when the train is late, or dinner is delayed, or a caller is unpunctual — and have a pocket book ready to read.

To be alive is to dream, to plan, to aspire and to act, and time must be apportioned between these as a man sees best for himself. As Sir John Lubbock wrote: "Do what you will, only do something."

Time in business

To Canada's aborigines time was free, without any exchange value, but for the business man of today time has become a standard unit for calculating costs and wage payments. Timing is an element, too, in business

decisions, because a question of policy includes not only what to do but when to do it.

Jobs that have to be done should be done without delay. Many writers of reports and business letters, as well as writers of books, would do well to chain themselves to their desks until the job is done.

The ultimate measure of time in an office is not made by the clock. We cannot measure business by the time of sitting at a desk, or the success of a meeting by the length of it, but we measure both by the amount accomplished.

Planning has a high place in the creed of good business. Hurry and surprise are two of the most dangerous situations, and they can only be avoided by planning time and timing. Every man on the executive team, from foreman to president, needs to be able to sense the time span available for preparation for action, and the span within which action must be taken to attain its utmost effectiveness.

Dissipation of effort sabotages the time needed for this executive function. The manager who allows his talk with a visitor to be interrupted by telephone calls, routine office business, messages on the intercom, and people who wander in for decisions or initials on pieces of paper — that man is wasting his time and energy. Perhaps staff could be allotted a regular hour at which to come to your office for consultation. Perhaps several reports could be combined into one. Perhaps you are doing work others should do. Perhaps you lose time by not keeping your calendar pad functioning.

There is no need to become bogged down in a lot of routine about keeping time clear, but unless there is some working system the effort to make time will be of no avail.

Something about leisure

Leisure time means different things to different people: time to do what you want to do, time free from work, time for recreation, time for self-improvement, time to be of service to others. It is sad when a person has no other idea than merely to spend it.

More reprehensible are those whose chief idea of leisure is to kill time. Labouring under the thought that work is a curse, they devote themselves to the pleasure principle, and believe that in their leisure periods they should make as little effort as possible, mental or physical. They are like the old gentleman who used to sit alone before his empty coffee cup in a cafe in Venice until well into the night. When asked what he was doing, he replied: "Waiting for it to be late."

Relaxing doesn't mean doing nothing. Not to be occupied and not to exist amount to the same thing. We need plans to make leisure delightful. There is nothing so wasteful of time, so melancholy, as idleness.

Time of your life

Time means different things to us at different ages. Once in a while we see backwards with nostalgia, as if Time had rebuilt his ruins, and we react to lost scenes, but to every part of life its own peculiar period has been assigned. The high spirits of children, the striving of youths, and the stability of maturity, are consistent with nature. Every one should be enjoyed in its own time.

After a certain number of years, depending upon our own characteristics and our physical and mental competence, we may not be able to think of many new things, but we can always find new ways to use what we already know, and this is a sort of newness that can be very satisfying.

The true way to think of our time of life is this: we have reached a stage of life that has a significance no other stage can possess. Time's curtain has gone up on an act toward which our childhood and youth were rehearsals. We can find in this act the joy and exhilaration we found in the earlier acts, if we meet it with courage and give it the best that we have to give.

The purpose of mature people should not be to husband their time resources in a miserly way, but to use them to the full so as to gain from every day its full quota of accomplishment and satisfaction.

The passing scene

Thomas Mann, the German novelist, wrote: "What I value most is transitoriness." He went on to say that the passage of time is not sad, but the very soul of existence. It imparts value, dignity and interest. It prompts us to feel and answer the newness of every day that dawns.

When we cease peering backward into the mists of our past, and craning forward into the fog that shrouds the future, and concentrate upon doing what lies clearly at hand, then we are making the best and happiest use of our time.

We may suffer setbacks that seem to steal our time irretrievably. So Thucydides might have thought when, for losing a battle, he was exiled from Athens in 424 B.C. Instead, he spent the twenty years in banishment travelling from place to place gathering facts which he used in writing his immortal histories.

To have time for everything we wish to do we need to measure what we spend our time on in terms of its value in happiness and achievement.

Time moves on with the deliberation of universal processes that can afford to be slow because they have eternity for completion. As for us, we wake up in the morning and our purse is magically filled with twenty-four hours. We need to seek by all means the best ways in which we may make the most of our allowance.