

TIME COMPETENCE

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A client of mine in private practice planned for weeks how to approach his boss for a raise. He wrote out in his mind a scenario of what he would say and what his stingy boss would reply and then what he'd retort until he emerged victorious. One day, he finally went in to ask his boss for the raise. As he began his well-rehearsed speech the boss interrupted him and said, "I've wanted to talk to you about your salary. You deserve a raise." The boss then offered a salary increase that was more than my client intended to ask for.

He came to his next counseling session furious that he did not get to play out the scenario. He had planned the scene in such detail that he was unable to react spontaneously. Playing out the scene as rehearsed became more important than the raise itself or the obvious valuing from the boss.

This man was time incompetent. He lived in the future, with idealized goals, plans expectations, predictions and fears. Time incompetent people may also live in the past, with guilts, regrets and resentments.

The time competent person lives primarily in the present, with full awareness, contact and full feeling reactivity. There is a positive correlation between a time competent person and one Abraham Maslow calls self-actualizing, that is, "a person who is more fully functioning and lives a more enriched life than does the average person. Such an individual is seen as developing and utilizing all of his unique capabilities, or potentialities, free of inhibitions and emotional turmoil of those less self-actualizing." (Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory Manual)

In simpler terms, the people Maslow selected for his study of healthier human beings felt safe and unanxious, accepted, loved and loving, respect-worthy and respected. He discovered that the more time competent people were, the more profound happiness, serenity and richness of the inner life they experienced.

If this is true, why aren't we all more time competent? Why aren't we willing to be happier? Thousands of pages have been written on this. "Thoreau noted in Walden that 'most of us will have so little respect for life that we will reach the point of death without ever having lived at all.' Erich Fromm echoed this fear when he stated that the greatest tragedy of life was the fact that most human beings died before they were fully born." (Buscaglia, Personhood)

We are so busy regretting, remembering, fantasizing, wishing, planning and pursuing that we forget to be in the process of doing, of being. We cannot die without the realization of giving up life. You must give up living in-the-now in order to die.

I had an uncle who had a stroke and was in the process of dying for more than 10 years. He bemoaned his miserable fate, but he lived on in the process of dying, never enjoying a moment. He outlived other seemingly healthier family members and friends. One day he went into a coma, and, as my aunt and cousin stood at his side, he waved goodbye and died. He gave up living.

Leo Buscaglia, in his excellent book, Personhood, says, "I cannot understand why, given a choice between joy and despair, people will so often choose despair. My daily experience brings me into contact with individuals who seem totally lifeless and frighteningly apathetic. Most of them dislike themselves and where they are, and would choose, if they could, to be someone else and somewhere else... They fear risks, lack faith and scoff at hope as if it were romantic nonsense. They seem to prefer to live in constant anxiety, fear and regret. They are too frightened to live in the present and almost totally devastated by the past."

I had one client who came to me two years ago extremely depressed and not wanting to live. Over this period of time we worked through her depression and she began feeling healthier and happier. She said to me as she left a session one day. "You know, I miss feeling depressed."

But overall, my observations are not quite as pessimistic as Buscaglia's. I see people who have developed coping styles that were appropriate at one time but no longer serve them. Once, the style had a payoff or was something that enabled them to survive. I saw a couple for marriage counseling, and the man could never state what he wanted. He always felt deprived yet he could not ask for satisfaction even though his wife was willing and eager to please him. He was the eldest of nine children, and when he was young, there wasn't enough love in his house to go around. Back then, asking or even knowing what he wanted or needed would have been met with rejection or frustration -- it was better not to know. This kind of behavior was appropriate then and inappropriate now. It allowed him to survive then and is killing him now.

It is like the little boy in a sleeping berth on a train who keeps saying over and over, "Boy, am I thirsty." The man next to him gets up and brings the boy a glass of water. He goes back to his berth and hears the little boy say, "Boy, was I thirsty."

Or like the woman on the bus who asks the driver if he is Jewish. The driver says, "No, lady, I'm not Jewish." The next day she boards the bus, sits down and looks at the driver for a long time. "Excuse me, sir," she says. "Are you sure you're not Jewish?" Out of frustration the driver says, "OK, OK, I'm Jewish!" The woman smiles and says, "That's funny. You don't look Jewish." (Stories by Jim Simkin in a Gestalt Workshop.)

We have an investment in holding on to behavior that has had a payoff in the past. We have certain basic human needs. One of them is to be attended to, paid attention to. If you get your attention by being sick, thirsty or asking questions, then you hang on to whatever works for you, even though it takes time away from getting on with a happier life.

Any behavior you desperately hold on to has a payoff. The payoff is obvious. If you examine your behavior and have no guarantee that any new behavior will have an equal or better kind of payoff, you get stuck. Risking, giving up the old ways and possibly losing the payoff, is painful, but if you aren't willing to put yourself on the line with what Maslow calls "feeling reactivity" (the sensitivity to your needs and feelings as they happen), then you will remain time incompetent.

Insecure or unloved people perceive the world as a threatening jungle. They build up defense patterns to prevent further loss of love or withdraw so that they will no longer be hurt. They may become dependent and submissive so that they will

challenge no one. These people live in the past.

"People who live in the future never catch up with the events for which they have prepared and never reap the fruits of their sowing. Their rehearsal for even the most unimportant situation may rob them of the ability to act spontaneously when it arrives." (Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory Manual) -- like my client who wanted a raise.

Another client of mine applied to a university as a freshman, but her grades weren't high enough, and the university turned her down. She went to a community college for two years and did well, but the university was the only place where she could pursue her major, and thus, her career and her ultimate happiness. She was afraid to reapply for university admission and she let two application deadlines go by. When she finally applied, she was immediately accepted. She became angry, then, because they had not accepted her three years earlier.

"The self-actualizing person is primarily time competent and thus appears to live more fully in the here and now. Such a person is able to tie the past and the future to the present in meaningful continuity; appears less burdened by guilts, regrets and resentments from the past than the non self-actualizing person, and aspirations are tied meaningfully to present working goals. There is an apparent faith in the future without rigid or over-idealistic goals." (Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory Manual).

Touch for Health forces people to focus on the now. We have all had the experience of trying to balance someone who isn't with us or who doesn't know what a muscle test is or wants to be touched and seems to be faking the muscle test to prolong the attention and touching. We must keep focusing them, saying to them, "Be with me now." When the body isn't in balance or when the muscles refuse to strengthen, the body is sending a message in the now.

When we balance someone and then do Emotional Stress Release (ESR) and the body reacts to the thoughts, even the mere mention of persons and activities: the body becomes more time competent. We hold points 11 and have them come to a conclusion -- any conclusion. Have you thought about it? We are saying, "Be here now, that is all you have." When this happens, the person gets out of the hurt of the past or worry about the future, the body relaxes and the muscles remain strong. We have in that moment demonstrated powerfully the importance of time competence.

Are you time competent? An inventory is included at the end of this paper for you to "test yourself." You probably already know. For those of you who aren't using your time as competently as you would like, here are a few suggestions:

1) Know how you allocate your time. Try this exercise: write down the things you value, the way you visualize your life could be based on your values. Then keep a log of the way you spend your time for two blocks of five days, counting 20 hours per day. If you awaken at 6 a.m., then count your day until 2 a.m. If you rise at 10 a.m., count your 20 hours until 6 a.m. the next day. Include a weekend in one of the blocks of time. Then count up the number of hours you spend in each activity and compare how you're spending most of your time with what you value most. Do they coincide?

2) Begin filling in the holes in your personality in order to form a whole. The holes are aspects of ourselves that we've learned to reject, having been taught that

we shouldn't be dishonest, grouchy, aggressive, greedy, selfish or whatever. We are anxious to isolate these characteristics out there and only see them in someone else. You condemn someone else's greediness and can't get in touch with your own. Anyone who knows how to cook knows you can't bake a cake without all the ingredients. Become aware of the gaps in your personality, accept them and come to appreciate them. Quit worrying about aspects of yourself that you think you don't like --they may be the vanilla or the baking powder for your cake.

3) Become aware. There are wonderful awareness exercises that we do here in Touch for Health. If you want more, the best book I have seen on the subject is Jeanette Rainwater's You're in Charge.

TIME USAGE INVENTORY

1. I do not feel it is necessary to defend my past actions.
2. I do not feel it necessary always to predict what will happen in the future.
3. I do not have feelings of resentment about things that are past.
4. People need not always repent their wrongdoings.
5. I do not worry about the future.
6. I prefer using good things now rather than saving them for the future.
7. Living for the future is as important as living for the moment.
8. Wishing and imagining can be bad.
9. I spend more time actually living rather than in preparing to live.
10. Only when living for the future ties into living for the present does my life have meaning.
11. I do not feel bound by the motto, "Don't waste your time."
12. What I have been in the past does not necessarily dictate the kind of person I will be.
13. It is important to me how I live in the here and now.
14. I do not feel the need to be doing something significant all of the time.
15. I do not suffer from memories.
16. I do not like to withdraw from others for extended periods of time.
17. I like to withdraw temporarily from others.
18. I do not regret my past.

19. For me, the future usually seems hopeful.
20. My past is a stepping stone for the future.
21. "Killing time" is not a problem for me.
22. For me, past, present and future is in meaningful continuity.
23. My hope for the future does not depend on having friends.

Adapted from Everett Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory (EDITS)

CHECK YOUR TIME COMPETENCE

Number True

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 21-23 | You are <u>faking</u> - no one is that good! |
| 18-20 | You are <u>Time Competent!</u> Congratulations. |
| 15-17 | You could use your time better. |
| 12-14 | You are in the present the same amount of time as in past or future. (The ideal time in present to time in past/future is a ratio of 8:1). |
| 0-11 | <u>Time Incompetent.</u> You are missing <u>the now</u> . |