

Gift of Time

Stepping Back and Making Sense

by Anne Davies

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Our lives are overloaded. The pressure is building. We try to meet everyone's needs, everyone's deadlines. We watch the daily tasks pile up on our desks, and we wonder if we're the only one who doesn't have time to deal with them.

We listen to the news on the radio – two, three, or more times a day. We watch the television and read the daily papers. We feel overwhelmed. We cannot do all we need to do. We cannot be all we need to be. We reach toward a crisis point – or perhaps it might be better describes as “meltdown.” What can be done?

I can tell you what I've been trying to do – sometimes with success, sometimes with success eluding even my best efforts. In this article, I'm going to explain the way I have started to view my life and the ever increasing demands on my limited time. Perhaps some of the ideas might be useful to you.

Four years ago, I started looking for a way to simplify my life. Taking some clues from the writing of Stephen Covey and what I knew from my work with strategic planning, I began to review my goals and establish a picture for myself of myself.

I reviewed all the things I did that gave me pleasure and contributed to the quality of life and the lives of others: my family, my community, and my profession. I considered what my talents and gifts were and how they best found expression. I looked at those parts of my life that gave me little or no pleasure. I decided I wanted time to do the things that were of value to me. I make some decisions.

I decided I needed to give some things up. Gave up watching television, because it annoyed and depressed me. I gave up reading newspapers daily, because they angered and saddened me. I decided to allocate only a part of my time each week to world events. I chose to listen to the news on the radio only once a day. I cancelled subscriptions to journals I never seemed to have time to read. Those actions gave me time.

I decided to learn how to say *no*. Saying no means I have to both set and understand my boundaries. I need to be able to understand what I'm trying to accomplish and whether or not the request will help me achieve my personal or professional goals. I don't always say no, but I say no more often.

I say no to many things. I choose not to listen to people who are complaining and really don't want to stop. I choose to say *no* to tasks I don't value that take away from the time I have to do things I do value. I choose to say *no* to conversations, jokes or materials that offend me. It isn't always easy, and I'm not always successful but I feel better about the quality of my life. I practice saying *no* in ways that don't hurt or anger but rather simply maintain my boundaries. Saying *no* has given me time and energy for other things.

I have come to understand that when I violate my ethics through my words, my actions or deeds, I pay a cost. Thoughtless or inappropriate actions cost time as I revisit decisions and the people it affects. I am trying to be more mindful, as described by Ellen Langer in her book called *Mindfulness*.

I have invested time determining my ethics and I try to live within my ethical boundaries. Sometimes I say no. Sometimes I say *yes*. Sometimes I remain quiet. Always I try to understand why I'm choosing to do something in a certain way and to move forward with an easy conscience. Marsha Sinetar, in a book titled *Healing Choices, Elegant Choices*, taught me that sometimes easy choices are hard to live with, and the hard choices are often easier to live with. Being clear about my personal ethics makes my life choices a little easier, simplifying my life and giving me more energy and time.

After reading *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Principle-Centered Leadership*, by Stephen Covey, I decided that I would benefit from understanding the overall purpose I had for my life. I gave the idea lots of thought. I talked about it with my husband and my friends as I sought to understand more about my talents, my goals, and the parts of my life to which I attributed great value.

I defined my life purpose with words three years ago, and it continues to guide my actions. It isn't a career plan. Rather it is a life plan, and, like my life, it is multifaceted. It recognizes the importance I place on my many roles – as mother, companion, friend, daughter, and teacher. My life plan helps me determine what to add to my life and what to give up. It gives me time.

In addition to defining my life purpose, I made a list of the things I believe about living and learning. I am beginning to bring my actions into alignment with what my head and my heart know. Articulating my beliefs and acting in accordance with them has helped me be more thoughtful. I can explain why I'm choosing to do a certain thing a certain way. I am more comfortable with my decisions. I have time.

I try to use my newly created time to do the things I value. I have more time to write – and activity I value. I have more time to talk with other educators about issues of concern and challenge to me – an activity I value. I have more time to be with my family – an integral part of the gift of life and a great value to me. My life is not perfect, but it does make more sense to me. When I stepped back and tried to make sense of my life, these were some of the choices I made for me. They have given me the gift of time. What about you? How can you give yourself the give of time?

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