



A Season of Happiness

Focus



F13



Time Management

using just a little to make a lot more



If you compare life today with the way it used to be, we are pretty lucky. A job like the weekly wash might have taken all day when scrubbing-boards and mangles were the go; now an automatic machine does the hard work. Cooking meals is also easier, travel to and from much quicker, heating and cooling the house is achieved with the flick of a switch; even cleaning the car is just a matter of driving through the auto-wash. You'd think, with all of the labour-saving devices at our disposal, that we'd have time to spare; yet there are still occasions when we could really do with a few extra hours in the day. Unfortunately, we've only got what we've been given and, in truth, we don't always use it as well as we could. We truly would benefit by thinking more about time and the management of it.

In a normal day, routine takes care of a good portion of the waking hours. We get out of bed, go to the bathroom, shave, clean teeth and have a shower. Then it's dress, eat breakfast, collect up whatever might be needed - briefcase, tool box, shopping list, back-pack, etc - and head off to work, the shops, school, or wherever. During this period, many are on auto-pilot and often in a rush, especially in a household with kids who seem incapable of organising themselves without the help of their slaves. These over-worked drudges, the parents and carers, race around like hairy goats until everyone else is sorted, before seeing to their own needs and schedules. If the rest of their day continues in the same fashion, they'll be exhausted come afternoon when it starts all over again! Of course, not everyone has children to worry about, but those who have avoided this particular mill-stone don't seem to fare much better, and that's simply because they waste time on frequent repetition and fail to plan what they do and when best to do it.

The last comment will probably annoy you, because you are doing the best you can - or are you? Think about something simple like getting changed. Young people especially have this convenient clothing repository called the floor. Why would they bother to hang stuff in a wardrobe, or fold it neatly and place it in a drawer when it can just be chucked onto the rest of the clutter hiding the carpet? After all, this saves time... at least it does when they take it off; but if the same item is needed again later, where is it? Somewhere in the mess, of course. They might spend half an hour to unearth it, only to discover it to be dirty from being trodden on, and covered in hairs. The one saving grace is that it is a mass of creases which means they won't stand out in a crowd because their friends are all dressed similarly. Fine, but not only do they look scruffy to the older generation; they have also chewed up something they never seem to have enough of - time. It might have taken less than sixty seconds to put their best top away neatly; because they didn't, they've succeeded in wasting 29 precious minutes looking for it; possibly more if, when they do find it, they decide it needs washing and an alternative has to be re-discovered.

Eventually, the un-wearable item will find its way to the laundry along with equally grubby compatriots, there to receive rejuvenation and hopefully a semblance of cleanliness. The washing machine, clothes-line and weather do most of the necessary, leaving a real person to hang it out and bring it in when dry. By then, a good deal of the garments are crease-free, just briefly. So, it's off the line and into the basket - a shirt, jeans, a skirt, a couple of towels, one on top of the other. Unless they have been folded, they will all be creased again in a matter of minutes and will need ironing - okay, maybe not the youngsters' gear because it wouldn't be cool. The rest, however, has to be pressed, and how long is that likely to take? I hate ironing

and have more to spend my time on than sliding a lump of hot metal up and down a padded board each time we do a wash. Am I making sense, or just being picky?

Let's move on to another machine - the motor car. Using it for a long journey usually involves a certain amount of pre-planning so that the trip and fuel to make it aren't wasted; but when you can get from A to B locally in minutes, why worry? You're almost out of milk - better whiz down to the shop: it will only take ten. Shortly after: "Mum, did you remember to get my laces? - I've got sports tomorrow." Off you go again. Twenty minutes following your return, you're starting to prepare the evening meal and discover there aren't enough potatoes and you'd forgotten to buy the frozen peas when you last shopped. That's alright - the supermarket's still open... So much for short trips! How long do you reckon you'd have spent in the car to sort that lot out in bits and pieces - half an hour, more? Truthfully, is it any wonder you can never seem to find a little time for yourself when you waste it unnecessarily sitting behind the wheel?

While on the subject, commuting is a regular time-waster, yet necessary to keep the family coffers topped up. You know how long the drive to work takes because you do it so frequently; and you probably leave home at the same time, get delayed by the usual traffic jams and road-works, and when you do arrive at your destination it always takes an age to find a parking spot. Have you ever thought about leaving a little earlier when the roads aren't quite as busy? Sure, you will get to work with time to spare which, after all, is the object of the exercise; but you will also be less stressed from the drive and won't have spent most of it in low gear or stopped with the engine idling, both burning fuel unnecessarily. The same consideration can be applied to leaving work. Try waiting ten minutes or so before racing out with the mob. Unless you are the competitive kind, let them have the head start and all the hassles. By leaving a bit later, you won't beat them home, but you'll make it to yours a darn sight easier and be less frazzled. I'm sure the family won't mind missing out on a few minutes of quality time with you, especially if you are a happier person for it. Ferrying the kids to school is a similar chore. It has to be done, and with pre-planning can incorporate some of the other jobs the car will be needed for, but in one round trip. That will save repeating the process over and over when it could all have been done quicker and so much easier, giving you some bonus time that is yours to use as you please.

Maybe you could allot a few minutes of it to make even more. Everyone has red tape to contend with: forms to be filled in, bills to pay, appointments to make, some to be dealt with on a regular basis, while others are just once or twice a year - like car registration, insurance, rates and taxes. None of these are a problem if the filing system is up to scratch, but if it is the equivalent of a kid's bedroom floor, a simple on-line payment which might have taken a couple of minutes can turn into a prolonged, stress-filled hunt just to find the statement. It isn't hard to set up a system that caters for the paperwork so that whatever is needed can be found almost immediately, dealt with, then filed away with the other past records. At least when someone claims you haven't paid a bill, you can go straight to it to prove you have; plus, that permission form for a school outing can be completed, signed and handed in by the due date without hassles. Think on it - no more tearing out your hair in a vain search for a specific piece of paper that wasn't filed appropriately when it came in and now could be anywhere. By allowing an extra minute or two at the right time, you can save much more than that later on.

As far as the home is concerned, most people prefer it to be clean and tidy; unfortunately, the time and effort required to keep it that way can often turn a good portion of the weekend into a loathsome grind, one that will probably have to be repeated in seven days. Maybe the kitchen isn't too bad, dishes and pans being washed the same day they are used; when left till later, however, not only will the washing up take longer because the food has become congealed, but unless every speck is removed, the end result could be food-poisoning which will take more time and money to fix, not to mention the discomfort. Then there are bench-tops and tables, supposedly there for the preparation of ingredients, all cleaned up or put away after use... or are they? Sometimes it's hard to even see them, because these large surfaces are a very handy spot to leave other things that have no real business being there in the first place - the mail and local newspaper, pens, numerous pairs of sunglasses, notes from school, a doctor's referral,

cd's, dvd's, a mobile-phone charger... The rest of the house could be the same with stuff littered everywhere. Mess does make mess, and eventually it has to be cleaned up. That's when those mainly responsible for making it are conspicuous by their absence and not likely to resurface until everything's done and dusted. Pretty smart, eh? They've had their quality time at your expense. Maybe a tough lesson needs to be learned and the question asked: "What did your last slave die of?"

I've already touched on the subject of travel, so here's another thought: how many times have you been inconvenienced by a breakdown? They can't always be avoided, but there are occasions when a bit of consideration for your vehicle can pay dividends. When you hear a strange noise, or the car doesn't seem to drive as well as it did, get it checked, so avoiding a minor problem turning into a major one that will leave you stranded and will probably cost a good deal more. And letting the fuel run out not only wastes time borrowing a can to get the car to the closest gas station, but the residue of dirt in the bottom of the tank can easily be sucked into the system, perhaps disabling the vehicle altogether – yet another unnecessary expense!

The strain on cars and drivers can be eased by the kids having bikes, but many parents still spend quite a bit of their "free" time fixing them up, especially punctures. It's part of Mum's and Dad's job description, but so too is teaching independence and responsibility. Have them look on while you do it to show them how. Next time, watch while they do it. After that, if they get a flat tyre, *they* repair it, or walk! Just make sure you don't cave in when they phone from a mate's house for you to come and pick them up. You are a parent and mentor, not a taxi service!

No doubt, you can find many areas where time can be saved later by spending a few extra minutes when it really matters. All it takes is a little thought and some pre-planning. For the intelligent creatures we are, that should be a breeze. I know you are tired after a day's work, dishing up the evening meal, sorting out the kids, and whatever else seems to be your lot; but working yourself to the point of being cranky, or collapsing from exhaustion won't be doing anybody a favour, least of all yourself. A stitch in time can save nine, maybe even ninety. Couldn't you do with some of that, honestly?

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