

HEALTH AND STRESS

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TIME CRUNCH STRESS AND "THE HURRY SICKNESS"

Key Words: Type A behavior, hostility, hurrying, impatience, stress, fat intake and cholesterol, the geography of time, "racing mind syndrome, setting goals, priorities and other time management tips

In 1960, expert testimony concerning time management was presented to a select Senate subcommittee. A panel of authorities told the legislators that because of numerous technologic advances, there would be marked changes in the workplace within twenty years or less. They predicted that people would be radically cutting back on how many hours a week and/or how many weeks a year they worked. Otherwise, they would have to start retiring at a much earlier age than customary.

According to these seers, the great challenge for the eighties and nineties would be what individuals would do with all the free time on their hands. What happened? Despite technologic improvements to make life "easier" that were not dreamed of in 1960, Americans are now working longer hours than ever before. Many complain there are just not enough hours in the day to satisfy work and personal needs.

As indicated in a previous Newsletter, true "leisure time", when there is nothing hanging over your head and you are not obligated to do anything at all, has practically become extinct for most of us. We are working longer and harder, and in a much more hurried fashion. Despite this, the old adage: "The faster I go, the behinder I get" often seems true. If you had to select one term that best characterizes the nature and quality of contemporary civilization, acceleration would be an appropriate choice.

Almost everything appears to be moving at a quickened pace. We travel, talk and eat faster and faster to save time - but time for what? Not infrequently it is to catch up on something else we have fallen behind in, rather than time for rest and relaxation. Eventually, this fast tempo tends to pervade all of our activities and becomes a way of life. It is not necessarily that we are busy, but rather hurried, and the two are far from synonymous. Being busy refers to all the things that we have to do. Being hurried describes our mental, emotional and physical state as we do these duties.

Being busy all the time does not necessarily mean that you are under increased stress. It depends on what you are doing and why you are doing it. Being busy can be a powerful stress buster for people preoccupied with pleasurable hobbies and activities. In contrast, always being in a hurry because of rarely having enough time is a major source of stress for many.

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Heart Attacks From Hurrying?

Some individuals always seem to be in a hurry. They want to get everything done as quickly as possible, even when there is no deadline. This is one of the characteristics of Type A behavior, described several decades ago by Friedman and Rosenman. These two San Francisco cardiologists were intrigued that a large percentage of their heart attack patients didn't smoke, have hypertension, or elevated cholesterols. Could something else be responsible? A clue came from the upholsterer restoring their waiting room furniture. He commented that in all his years of experience, he had never seen leather chairs wear out in such a fashion. Only the front edge of the seats and arms were damaged. Everything else was in great condition. It soon became clear that this was due to rubbing back and forth by impatient patients in a hurry to get back to work.

Further study revealed that in addition to always being hurried, impatient, and excessively involved with their jobs, many of these coronary candidates also tended to be overly competitive, aggressive, hostile, and more easily angered. Frequent fidgeting, foot or finger tapping and other physical and vocal indications of impatience were also quite common.

This collection of traits and attitudes, which was termed Type A behavior, seemed to be just as important a contributor to coronary heart disease as anything else. This was confirmed by an expert panel convened in 1981 by the National Heart, Blood and Lung Institute. They concluded that type A behavior was as powerful a risk factor for coronary events as smoking, hypertension and elevated cholesterol, and even combinations of these.

Since then, there has been considerable controversy and speculation over which Type A characteristic is the most pernicious. In recent years, media hype has fostered the notion that "cynical hostility" is the most toxic Type A component. However, as Dr. Ray Rosenman explained at our last Congress, the high hostility measurements that led to all the publicity because of a purported correlation with coronary events have serious flaws. In addition, high hostility scores correlate best with all cause mortality rather than coronary deaths. Ray also indicated that it is a marked competitiveness that seems to be seminal for most Type A traits, including aggressive drive, enhanced anger/hostility dimensions, as well as rapid pace of activities. This fiercely competitive component often derives from deep-seated but concealed feelings of anxiety and insecurity due to fear of failure.

It is important to emphasize that not everybody classified as Type A by accepted measurement techniques exhibits all of the Type A traits noted above. Some, like being overly competitive, aggressive, or prone to anger may be more linked to coronary events than others. However, hurriedness per se does not seem to be very high on the danger scale. Just because people dislike standing in long lines or driving behind a slower moving car doesn't mean that they are necessarily also strongly hostile, aggressive, or overly competitive. Such "hurry-sickness" sufferers may not have the same health risks as some who appear to be identical, but have other more toxic Type A traits. Hurrying may have become a habit because of chronic external environmental influences, rather than any concealed and deep-seated fear of failure. *(Continued on Page 3)*

Paul, Ralph, And Impatient Patients

Friedman and Rosenman described this hurry aspect of Type A behavior in a fifty-two year-old patient appropriately named Paul:

"A very disproportionate amount of his emotional energy is consumed in struggling against the normal constraints of time. 'How can I move faster and do more and more things in less and less time?' is the question that never ceases to torment him.

Paul hurries his thinking, his speech, and his movements. He also strives to hurry the thinking, speech, and movements of those about him; they must communicate rapidly and relevantly if they wish to avoid creating impatience in him. Planes must arrive and depart precisely on time for Paul, cars on the highway must maintain a speed he approves of, and there must never be a queue of persons standing between him and a bank clerk, a restaurant table, or the interior of a theater. In fact, he is infuriated whenever people talk slowly or circuitously, when planes are late, cars dawdle on the highway, and queues form."

The portrait of Paul goes on for several pages to describe how his various other Type A traits are manifested. Because of these, his chances of escaping some sort of coronary event within the next ten years are estimated to be only about one in twenty.

In contrast, Ralph, the model Type B "patient" emphasizes the distinction between patient as a noun and an adjective. The very first thing we learn about him is that:

"Ralph is a very patient man. Indeed, sometimes he feels that he is far too patient in his dealings with other people. Certainly he doesn't mind if his friends speak reasonably slowly; he generally speaks in an unhurried manner himself. Indeed, sometimes Ralph may break off speaking in the middle of a sentence to think a bit longer about the subject at hand before continuing. When Ralph's plane departure is delayed, he simply shrugs his shoulders, traipses indolently around the airport, inspects the racks of paperback novels, and reads with pleasure as he sips a cup of coffee. Of course he doesn't like to stand in line, but if he must, he good-naturedly resigns himself to doing so, observing closely and with interest the faces and conversations of others standing near him."

Etymologically, a *patient* is someone who is suffering. The noun is derived via Old French from the Latin *patior*, "suffer", which is also the source of passive and passion. We still speak of the *passion* or suffering of Christ. As an adjective, its use in Latin had already taken on the contemporary connotation of bearing or accepting some affliction or burden with calmness. A "patient" person is someone who suffers but usually does not complain or even say anything about it.

The current definition of a patient as someone receiving medical or surgical care came much later. It originally implied not only having some health problem, but also being willing to wait for it to be resolved. This latter aspect has changed in recent years. The era of the supplicant patient kneeling in awe before the god-like physician eager to follow any prescription has essentially disappeared. Socio-cultural changes such as greater access to medical information, drastic alterations in the delivery of medical care, and patients' rights activities have contributed to a much more proactive role for patients in their treatment. Like everything else, they want results as soon as possible since they don't have time to wait. Many Type B's like Ralph might now also be included in this group of impatient patients.

In attempting to illustrate the marked differences between Types A and B, the authors of this concept began with hurriedness and impatience. Perhaps this was because these can be more readily recognized than other traits, but the distinction may no longer be so significant. Most people dislike standing in long lines or being stuck behind some slow car in traffic when they have a schedule to keep. If they "lose time" because of such unanticipated delays, they may have to make it up by completing other tasks more quickly. While they and others may be victims of "hurry sickness" for these and similar reasons, that does not necessarily mean they should be classified as Type A. Even the authors had trouble finding 80 San Francisco men not under time pressures to include in their study. They were saved by "municipal clerks and the embalmers' unions."

At the time Friedman and Rosenman first proposed their revolutionary hypothesis of Type A behavior as a contributor to coronary heart disease, the prevailing view was that the major culprit was elevated cholesterol due to high fat intake. These two cardiologists felt that there were numerous arguments against this. The Navajo Indians consumed just as much or more fat than their Caucasian neighbors but rarely suffered from coronary heart disease. The Masai tribesmen of Kenya who ingest startling amounts of cholesterol and animal fat almost never had heart attacks or evidence of significant coronary artery disease on autopsy. Harvard nutritionists compared the dietary fat intake of Bostonian Irishmen with that of their brothers who had not emigrated and found that those who remained in Ireland ate much more cholesterol and animal fat. Yet, they had only half the incidence of heart attacks as their Boston brethren.

Were the Masai, Navajo, and Irishmen who remained on their native soil less likely to have coronary heart disease because they had lower stress levels? Numerous studies since then by Friedman, Rosenman, and others have clearly shown that emotional stress has far more profound influence on cholesterol levels than dietary fat intake. Tax accountants' cholesterols start to rise sharply in the month or two before April 15, and just as rapidly return to normal after this despite the fact that there is no significant change in diet. Cholesterol levels soar in students in the hours prior to a final exam, fall when the test is over, but shoot up again if they are told they have failed the exam (although they had actually passed).

The concept of Type A behavior was born when the authors studied the fat intake of volunteers from the San Francisco Junior League and their husbands. The presumption was that the wives had fewer heart attacks because they ate less fat. However, there were no significant differences, as the League's President had predicted at the start of the study. When it was over, she triumphantly told them the real cause of the husbands' heart attacks. "It's stress, the stress they receive in their work. That's what's doing it."

Is Time Urgency A Cultural Disease?

Another argument against fat intake was the marked variability in the relative incidence of heart attacks between men and women in different parts of the world. Two thirds of heart attacks in the U.S. occurred in men, but in Mexico, the incidence was the same in both sexes. The same equal split was found in the south of Italy, but in northern Italy the ratio was four men to one woman. Since married couples and others also presumably ate the same foods and had similar dietary fat intake, what would account for such wide variations?

The best explanation was that these differences seemed to correlate best with certain differences in the behaviors of men and women in these particular geographical locations. Type A behavior emerged as a constellation of characteristics that were predominantly male, such as being very aggressive, competitive, impatient, domineering and being prone to feelings of anger and hostility. These traits were usually seen to a lesser degree in the "weaker sex", this varied depending on sociocultural factors.

It appears likely that time urgency and "hurry sickness" also vary in different parts of the world for similar reasons. Over twenty years ago, during a teaching stint in Brazil, Robert Levine, was constantly amazed at how many students attending his two hour lecture would arrive an hour or more late, while others lingered around for an equal amount of time asking questions long after the class ended. Nobody ever apologized or even bothered to offer an explanation for their rude behavior. A laid back psychology professor from Fresno, he was hardly a Type A who might be expected to be driven up the wall by such practices. Even though he conducted his own activities at his usual slow tempo, his hosts would also frequently tell him "Calma, Bobby, calma. No matter how hard I tried to slow down, there almost always seemed to come the breathless 'Calma, por favor'—sometimes as an appeal, other times offered with head-shaking pity." Levine began to wonder whether time urgency also varied in other cultures or parts of the world, and spent the next twenty years investigating this.

(Continued on page 5)

He was encouraged to do this because of reports from colleagues with similar experiences in India where interminable waiting and always being late was taken for granted by the locals. Being in a hurry is considered not only unnatural, but harmful. One explained that "There is an inscription on the narrow-gauge Darjeeling Himalayan Express that reads: 'Slow' is spelled with four letters; So is 'life.' 'Speed' is spelled with five letters; So is 'death.'" Another researcher had traveled to Trinidad on a Guggenheim Fellowship to study its people's humor. But what he learned more than anything was that he was always seriously out of step. Latecomers to appointments would greet his impatience with comments like: "Eh mon, what's your hurry, nuh? De sea ain goin' no place. Relax mon, a'm comin' to yuh just now." "So," as the researcher explained, "I wait".

An anonymous British traveler had noted "The further East I travel the sloppier the perception of time becomes. It irritates me in Poland and drives me gibbering in the USSR."

That was confirmed by another of Levine's colleagues in Russia who was late for an appointment. His guide began shouting to their cab driver a Russian phrase (Pah yeh kaly) meaning "Get there yesterday" or literally, "Let's went." The literal translations of words like "hurry" and "rush" simply do not carry the urgency in Russian that they do in English. If he had merely ordered the driver to "Get there as soon as you can," the guide told him he would have arrived even later than he did. As it turned out, he arrived very late, but still found that he was some twenty minutes earlier than the fellow he was scheduled to meet.

Intrigued by these and other equally intriguing stories, Levine set off on a global odyssey to scientifically study the perception of time in different countries and cultures rather than relying on anecdotal reports. The results of these labors, which lasted for two decades, are recorded in his recent book *A Geography of Time: The Temporal Misadventures of a Social Psychologist, or How Every Culture Keeps Time Just a Little Bit Differently*.

He went into one or more of the major cities, of some 31 countries, and measured the average walking speed of at least 35 randomly selected males and female pedestrians over a distance of 60 feet on summer days during the morning rush in at least two locations on main downtown streets. Locations were chosen that were flat, unobstructed, had broad sidewalks, and were sufficiently uncrowded that the pedestrians could potentially walk at their own preferred maximum speed. Only pedestrians walking alone who had no physical handicaps and were not window-shopping were timed. In each city they also presented clerks with a note in the local language requesting a common stamp and the equivalent of a \$5 bill, measuring the elapsed time between the passing of the note and the completion of the request. To estimate a city's interest in clock time, he observed the accuracy of 15 randomly selected bank clocks in main downtown areas in each city and compared them to those reported by the phone company. The three scores for each country were then statistically combined into an overall "pace-of-life" score.

The conclusions from these studies were that there are five principal factors that determine the tempo of cultures around the world. People are prone to move faster in places with healthier economies, a high degree of industrialization, larger populations, cooler climates, and a cultural orientation toward individualism. The primary determinant of a city's tempo is economics. The strongest and most consistent finding was that places with vital economies tended to have faster tempos. The fastest people we found were in the wealthier North American, Northern European, and Asian nations. The slowest were in third-world countries, particularly those in South and Central America and the Middle East. As a city grows larger, the value of its inhabitants' time increases with the city's increasing wage rate and cost of living, so that economizing on time becomes more urgent, and life becomes more hurried and harried. This book is chock full of fascinating anecdotes that vividly illustrate this and all the other conclusions noted above.

Do You Have "Hurry Sickness"?

It should be emphasized that there can be vast differences in tempo between people within the same culture and even the same community. While there can be several reasons for this, most research has focused on individual differences in time urgency traits, or the struggle to achieve as much as possible in the shortest period of time.

Time urgency is one of the defining components of the Type A coronary-prone personality patient. Rosenman and Friedman characterized Type A's as being impatient, having a tendency to walk quickly, eat quickly, and do two or more things at the same time. The most popular Type A behavior questionnaire, the Jenkins Activity Survey, measures these characteristics with a "Speed and Impatience" scale. Several other Type A scales with labels such as "Time Urgency," "Perpetual Activation," and "Timelock" have subsequently been developed, but even in all these tests, there are extensive individual differences in the degree to which people are preoccupied with making every second count. Tempo may vary sharply depending on the time, place, what the person is doing, and who else is present.

It is quite normal to experience signs and symptoms of time urgency under certain stressful circumstances. In some instances, it may be difficult to determine when such behavior has become chronic or borders on being pathological. Time urgency can also be manifested in different ways as indicated below. Individuals who tend to fall into most of the following categories or are particularly extreme in even a few areas would likely be classified as having a time urgent personality.

- being overly concerned with the exact time and frequently looking at your watch.
- a tendency to speak rapidly, frequently interrupting others who talk more leisurely, but resenting someone who interrupts you.
- rarely taking time to eat three daily meals in a slow, relaxed manner.
- being frequently urged by your spouse or friends to slow down and take it easy.

- constantly setting schedules and trying to adhere to the specific amount of time you have arbitrarily allotted to each activity.
- becoming excessively annoyed in slow traffic and honking or making rude gestures to speed up a slower driver ahead of you.
- walking faster than most people.
- a compulsive tendency to make lists of things to do, especially when going on a trip.
- becoming very irritated when you have to wait in line for more than a few minutes at the bank, a store, or to be seated in a restaurant, and sometimes leaving if there is a short wait.
- having an abundance of nervous energy that causes you to be on edge when you have to sit for an hour without having anything to do.

Extremely fast paced people who suffer from "hurry sickness" usually have most of these habits, often to extremes. They are adept at simultaneously eating dinner, watching television, reading a newspaper while carrying on a conversation. Such individuals have a loss of interest in most aspects of life except for those directly connected with achieving their goals. They are preoccupied with numbers and tend to measure or value things in terms of quantity rather than quality. They often experience "racing-mind syndrome", which is characterized by rapidly shifting thoughts. This gradually erodes the ability to concentrate, and when severe, can make it difficult to fall asleep.

Another common trait appears to be a diminished ability to accumulate pleasant memories. This often stems from a preoccupation with potential problems or crises that might occur in the future, or a focus on the past that primarily dwells on disturbing events that might recur. As a result, ruminations tend to focus primarily on unpleasant situations so that memories of pleasant experiences are repressed or blocked out.

Man measures time and time measures man.

Old Italian Proverb

A mind that is fast is sick . A mind that is slow is sound. A mind that is still is divine.

Meher Baba

Tempus Fugit

The perception of time is relative. Time does seem to fly by when you're having fun and to drag on forever when you are bored. As Albert Einstein explained "When you sit with a nice girl for two hours, it seems like two minutes; when you sit on a hot stove for two minutes, it seems like two hours. That's relativity."

Yet, we all know that the passage of time proceeds at a constant, continuing, inevitable and inexorable pace. *How To Live On Twenty-Four Hours A Day* was the title of a very popular book written by Arnold Bennett 90 years ago. It emphasized that the proverb "time is money" is a serious understatement. If you don't have enough money in your bank account to live on, you can borrow, find additional work or even steal. But you can't add or subtract from the amount of time available to you.

As Bennett explained: "Time is the inexplicable raw material of everything. Without it nothing is possible. The supply of time is truly a daily miracle. You wake up in the morning, and lo! your purse is magically filled with 24 hours of the unmanufactured tissue of your life. It is yours. The most precious of possessions showered upon you in a manner as singular as the commodity itself. . . . Nobody can take it from you. It is unstealable. And no one receives either more or less than you receive. Wealth or genius is never rewarded by even an extra hour a day. And there is no punishment. Waste this precious commodity as you will, and the supply will never be withheld from you."

In his autobiography, Will Rogers wrote "Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save". That is no longer true and time seems to fly faster the older we get. Nobody has enough time, especially when it comes to work. As someone noted, the only person who got all his work done by Friday was Robinson Crusoe.

There are ways you can learn to utilize your time more efficiently so that you can not only increase your productivity but also improve your quality of life. Unfortunately, few of us invest the time to explore and implement these measures. Those complaining they don't have the time to do this are the ones that need it most.

The most important thing you can do is to establish goals. Everyone has certain short term goals, like buying a car or going on vacation, or long term goals with respect to getting a promotion or planning for retirement. As the French philosopher Montaigne noted "No wind favors a vessel that does not have a port of destination." Too many of us are buffeted about on the sea of life, taking each day as it comes, without any clear direction as to where we should be heading.

Goals also need to be appropriate. If your aim in life is to be junior vice president of the bank and you arrive at that position only to find that it is a glorified, meaningless title, you will be disappointed. If on the other hand your goal is utterly unrealistic, you will be constantly frustrated. Strive for your highest attainable aim. As Robert Browning said, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp"

Once you have established your goals, prioritize them and spend your time on those activities that will allow you to succeed in achieving them. Separate what you have to do into things that must be done immediately, those you would like to do today but can be put off until tomorrow, and others that don't fall into either of these categories.

Schedule your important work for periods of the day when you are most productive. We are all different. Morning larks jump out of bed early, are full of energy in the morning and hit their peak around noon. Night owls don't start to function until late morning, get into gear in the mid afternoon and can keep going on after that.

Don't take anything but urgent calls between certain hours and learn to say "No". Just because you know you could easily do a task if you had the time, don't succumb to this. Learn to delegate authority as well as responsibility for assignments that others can do or be trained to do. Assess how you actually spend your time and list things to curtail, like idly surfing the web or watching TV. Avoid writing letters or talking on the phone if an e-mail will suffice. The real challenge is not time management, but rather in learning how to manage yourself.

Book Review: *FASTER: THE ACCELERATION OF JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING*, James Gleick, Pantheon Books, New York, 1999, 324 pgs. \$24.00

Anyone who has read *FASTER* will not be surprised to learn that it was selected by *Time Magazine* and *Esquire* as the Book of the Year. Thoroughly researched and extremely well written, it is an insightful, tongue-in-cheek commentary on contemporary society's obsession with time - and specifically, reducing the time it takes to do just about everything. A quick scan of a few of the three dozen chapter titles will provide some appreciation of the impressive array and wide range of issues that are addressed: "Lost In Time", "Jog More, Read Less"; "On Internet Time"; "Time Is Not Money", "Modern Conveniences"; "Eat and Run"; "How Many Hours Do You Work?"; "The Telephone Lottery"; "Sex and Paperwork"; and "The Door Close Button." For many, it will be like looking in a mirror. (How many times have you gotten into an elevator and pushed the deliberately disabled door close button to speed things up?). In Asia, this is the button with the paint worn off.

Never in the history of the human race have so many had so much to do in so little time. As a result, travel, communication, technology, and almost everything else associated with daily existence keeps speeding up. As the author comments, "We are in a rush. We are making haste. A compression of time characterizes the life of the century now closing." Remote control devices facilitate frequent channel surfing and fast forwarding a VCR tape, telephone redial buttons can save a second or two, microwaves and instant food shorten the time to prepare meals, computers and modems keep getting faster and faster, the number of frames that can be crammed into a 30 second commercial keeps increasing, and the list goes on and on. The instantaneity of daily life is reflected in "instant coffee, instant intimacy, instant replay, and instant gratification". Unfortunately, the more we fill our lives with time-saving strategies and devices, the more rushed we feel.

At the other end of the spectrum, Gleick points out several time-consuming and stressful irritants. "Tollbooths are monuments of civic ineptitude --along with the telephone lotteries at city agencies and queues at unemployment and passport offices." The telephone, long touted as a superb time saver, has now become the source of some spectacular delays, particularly for callers who keep pushing buttons to reach a destination, but are then put on hold with no indication of when a real person will be reached. "And before you get put on hold, you must get past the busy signal." Traffic jams are a major culprit. A few years ago, one study found that in Los Angeles alone, more than 2.3 million person-hours were lost to traffic delay over a 12-month period.

According to Gleick, it is important to "recognize that neither technology nor efficiency can acquire more time for you, because time is not a thing you have lost.... It is what you live in. You can drift or you can swim, and it will carry you along either way." Although it provides more questions than answers, this book will be a timely wake-up call for many. **Highly recommended.**

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