

October 29, 2018
By Robert J. Tamasy

TIME: FRIEND OR FOE ?

In the business and professional world, as well as other areas of life, time is somewhat of a paradox. When facing an inflexible deadline, time seems to move incredibly fast, escalating our stress levels. But when we are anxiously awaiting an important decision – perhaps a job promotion, or a potential client deciding whether to sign a contract – the pace of time can seem to slow down significantly.

During a recent trip to Italy, I observed what occurs in much of Europe. Businesses, including retailers and restaurants, often close during the midafternoon hours to allow everyone to take a rest and become refreshed. It is not uncommon for individuals in Europe to take several weeks, even a month, off from work during the summer months.

Americans, by contrast, often seem enslaved by time. Many are reluctant to take vacations, for fear a competitor will gain an edge on them or, perhaps, their boss will find someone else to fill their position while they are gone. Some workers even gobble down lunches at their desks, afraid of falling behind in their job demands.

Just weeks ago, I underwent a second heart surgery, which presented me with a different perspective on time. This surgery, to replace a damaged aortic valve, was accomplished through a much less invasive procedure than my open-heart surgery nearly 12 years ago. So the recovery has been much easier and faster; but the seriousness of the operation still helped to put things in perspective.

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From a job standpoint, the work I do, although I believe it is important, would quickly be done by someone else if I were no longer able to do it. Some of the things I do simply would no longer be done at all. But from the standpoint of relationships I have – with my wife, children, grandchildren, friends, and the men I meet with in mentoring/discipling relationships – that is where my absence would be felt the most.

So the question is: Moving forward, where is my time best invested? Not to say I should not continue to do the work I enjoy and feel called to do, but not at the expense of time I should be spending with the important people in my life.

In the Bible, it admonishes us to *“redeem the time for the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16)*. This does not mean time is inherently bad, but the passage of time continues relentlessly, whether we attempt to use it wisely or not. I recall the classes in time management I attended years ago. In reality, “time management” is a misnomer because we cannot “manage” it. We cannot put it into a safety deposit box or a self-storage unit for later use. It is not a commodity we can preserve; we can only resolve to utilize it as effectively and meaningfully as possible.

Another biblical passage on time, *Ecclesiastes 3:1-18*, offers the perspective. *“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven....”* To me, this means there are times for focusing my attention and energy to meet critical deadlines, but also there are times for being with my family, pursuing favorite pastimes or hobbies, or simply seeking to restore myself physically, mentally and spiritually. As someone has said, it is unlikely anyone on their deathbed has sincerely announced with regret, “I wish I had spent more time at work.”

© 2018. Robert J. Tamasy has written *Business at Its Best: Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today's Workplace; Tufting Legacies*; coauthored with David A. Stoddard, *The Heart of Mentoring*, and edited numerous other books, including *Advancing Through Adversity* by Mike Landry. Bob's biweekly blog is: www.bobtamasy.blogspot.com.

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. Does it seem that time passes quickly sometimes, and drags along very slowly in other circumstances? Why do you think this is the case?
2. Have you ever thought about the irony of studying “time management,” when the passage of time cannot truly be managed or controlled?
3. Where do you fall in terms of time/work philosophy? Are you diligent to take time off from work when you have the opportunity, enjoying being able to rest and rejuvenate? Or do you typically regard time as an enemy, determining to cram as much work and activity as possible into every waking minute or hour? In either case, what serves as your motivation?
4. How do you – or could you – go about “redeeming the time” more effectively?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 23:4-5; Ecclesiastes 3:1-18; Galatians 6:10; Colossians 4:5-6

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