

If You Don't Pause, Nothing Worthwhile Will Catch Up With You

by
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The Pause that Refreshes. Remember that phrase? What ever happened to those pauses where we admired a sunset, laughed with a friend over a beer, or shared the Coke the phrase encouraged?

We've lost them. We let technology weasel them away from us and in the process have become a crabby, nasty, me-first nation of soreheads. How often a week do you hear the word "mean-spirited"? How often do you feel it?

The loss of the "pause" contributes mightily to our confused national response to life. Look at us: the economy is basically good, the deficit is going down, statistically even crime is dropping. In the last year we peacefully resolved international hot spots in Korea, Cuba and Haiti and yet EVERYONE IS TICKED OFF. What gives?

When you lose the pauses in your life, you lose the good things. Not only do you not have time to do them—to cuddle with your kids on the couch, to toss around ideas with a co-worker over coffee, to read a good book by the fire—you also lose the time to *feel* them.

Positive emotions take more time to experience than negative ones. And since we need to feel "something," we turn our frustration into anger. Anger's fast. It's easy to get a quick emotional fix. All you have to do is cut someone off in traffic, yell at a talk show, or make a nasty remark to a store clerk. You spout off, you get a little adrenalin rush, and bam, it confirms you're alive. Whether your target deserved the anger is unimportant.

Unfortunately, anger, especially when it's misplaced, doesn't satisfy for long and so we have to get angry again. Hence, a nation of soreheads.

The positive emotions are far more satisfying, but they take far more time.

Joy, for example. Whether it comes from your toes up or your heart out, real joy embraces the world in a way that forces you to take notice, to pause.

That major emotion love, requires time to grow and mature. And the expressions of loveÑ a knowing wink, a welcome backrub, a hated chore done without complaintÑ need to be acknowledged. That, too, takes time.

Remember pride? Now there is one for the endangered species list! We used to feel pride in our accomplishments, or the accomplishments of others: our task force, our sports team, our children. It's not that as individuals or as a nation, we don't have things to feel proud about. We don't feel pride because pride needs to be savored and we don't have that kind of time.

We start our next project before we finish the current one, we watch three ball games simultaneously on TV and barely know who wins, and we yell at the Little League referee's close call because we think it shows our child we care.

We are a hurried people. Whether logging on to the information "highway," tossing back a "double espresso" to relax (!), or listening to a talk show host appropriately named "Rush," things are going too fast to make sense.

We long for the old days because life was slower, there was time to assimilate new ideas, personalities or technologies. We didn't have to pace ourselves. Life did it for us. But as we moved from typewriters to word processors, from wall crank phones to car cell phones, and even from stoves to microwaves, we lost assimilation time.

The littlest changes can cost us. Think of the move from buttons to zippers to velcro. We lost a pause right there.

(For myself, the biggest adjustment has been from US Mail to a fax machine. It used to be that when I sent that check or letter off I knew I had a couple of daysÑmaybe a week if the other party had to respond. Now I get faxes from a colleague in the Netherlands that, given our time difference, I receive nine hours *before* he sends them!)

In his book, "Timelock," Ralph Keyes says: "The cumulative effect of eliminating one opportunity after another to catch our breath is to create a breathless society." Our brains may

have resented the pause to change the paper in the typewriter, or to wait for a call to go through or a radio to warm up, but our nervous system liked it. We need to find ways to reclaim that pause.

Rapid change is here to stay. If you want to master it, pace yourself. Give yourself the gift of some assimilation time. Pause to share a joke, buy some flowers, walk around the block. Count an unappreciated blessing: your health, a good neighbor, an old car that keeps running.

Use new technologies to your advantage. In the old days we washed our hair once a week because it took so long to dry. Then we invented hair dryers. Now we shampoo daily.

Has the technology of a hair dryer saved us any time? No. But you can use it to your advantage. Put this additional time to work (or rather, to rest) by allowing yourself an extra reflective moment in the shower.

And that information "highway?" Get a grip! It's only a term. You can choose to think of it as a 1990's German autobahn with no speed limit or a 1950's USA Route 66 with Burma Shave signs. Take control. Stop once in a while, stretch your legs, have a picnic at an electronic bulletin board.

With stimuli coming from all directions, real freedom is the ability to pause, to take a deep breath—maybe two deep breaths—and decide where to focus your energy. Ask yourself, "What are my options? Where do I want to be in the long run? What do I need to do to get there?"

You can be the Master of Your Universe or a Poster Child for the Breathless Society. It's your choice.

Today's changes cannot be mastered in an annual two week vacation. They must be met in little ways every day. Make the time to savor the good things in your life. If you don't pause, nothing worthwhile will catch up with you!

Author's bio: Dr. Schwab lives in Seattle, WA and speaks in the US and Canada on the topics of coping with change and using humor to enhance the workplace environment.