

There's Never Enough Time Give Yourself a Most Important Gift This Holiday Season: The Time of Your Life

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When we get right down to it we have to draw one inescapable conclusion: time is our most important asset. And like most assets, there never seems to be enough of it. There are always so many things to do, so many pressures, so many things to keep track of. Our lives seem to whiz by, and where has our time gone? (Can you believe that this is the end of the year and the holidays are upon us again?) If time is our most important asset, why do we know so little about it? Why do we stay so busy yet accomplish so little? Are our accomplishments all that important in the overall scheme of our lives?

Think what modern-day life encourages us to do. We need to keep up with the news, drive to work, perform meritoriously on the job, work overtime, maintain a spiritual life, have many friends and a few deeper relationships, be a good partner and perhaps a good parent, keep up with TV and movies and books and music and all the new ideas, travel, have several hobbies, dress in the right fashions, learn about the Internet, keep good credit, be a good neighbor and participant in the community, do volunteer work, take classes, exercise, and so it goes. It is little wonder that many of us feel so pressured. In the end, what really matters is how well we have lived, not necessarily how much we have done.

Like all things natural, our bodies have internal rhythms. There are times during the day, or even the month or the year, when we do things well, quickly and easily. We have spurts of energy when we are at our best. And there are other times when our bodies cry out for rest, for down time. To try to be at your most productive during this part of the cycle is futile, and it leads to a great increase in stress on your body. This is one factor

related to some disturbing societal trends: the incidence of cardiovascular and immune-deficiency diseases in American over the last few decades has been astounding, not to mention the increase in rates of depression, family destruction, and substance abuse.

Many cultures incorporate these natural body cycles into the rhythms of daily life: think of the English with their afternoon tea or Hispanic cultures with the afternoon siesta when virtually everything closes down. In America we punish ourselves for feeling less than productive at all times. We drink another cup of coffee for its caffeine rush, and then we plod ahead, trying to accomplish all we can even when our bodies are crying out for some R&R time. We lose awareness of our need to rest, to do nothing. The irony of all this, of course, is that if we could get in touch with the body's natural rhythms, alternating between periods of activity and rest, we would be much more productive in the long run.

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Happy Holidays!

As the Holiday Season is upon us, we often find ourselves stressed and exhausted. So I thought I might help lift the burden a bit by offering you 15 stress reduction tips to help you cope and shift your approach to the holidays. If you learn to make good choices and keep those choices to a minimum, you can have your holidays and enjoy them too!

1. Figure out what you don't like about the holidays...then stop doing it or do it different.

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A Harris poll found that the average American had 37 percent more leisure time in 1973 than in 1990, and that was six years ago! All of our technological advances, like computers, faxes, cellular phones, pagers, e-mail, and computerized machines everywhere, don't really give us more time, contrary to popular myth. If anything, they contribute to time pressure. Giving in to this pressure serves to isolate us from other people so that we no longer have the time for easy personal conversation that tends to buffer us from anxiety and disease. We easily anger when someone slows us down or interrupts our concentration. We pay more attention to small, urgent details rather than developing an awareness of the most important things in our lives. Our self-esteem drops when we feel that we can never keep up or do all that we should be doing. We may lose sleep, eat poorly, avoid exercise, and rely on sweets, alcohol or drugs to keep us going.

Until the Middle Ages there were no clocks. Other cultures even now measure time more in terms of seasons or other natural cycles than by hours and minutes. Just a generation or two ago people had much more free time just to be, to enjoy, to develop more meaningful relations. This is not to suggest that we should go back in time, because we cannot. But we do need to get in touch with our more natural internal rhythms which are a primary source of stability and health and to incorporate this awareness into our everyday lives. Rather than trying to squeeze more activities into the time we have available, it may be more helpful to examine what is really meaningful in our lives and to devote our time to those pursuits. In other words, we may need to develop a new relationship...both with ourselves and to time.

Some Steps to Taking Ownership of Your Time

- **Take a periodic review of what is important in your life.** The holiday season is a perfect time to look back on the year (actually, some people use New Year's Eve for this purpose!). Reflect on how you have spent the year, what you have accomplished and how it fits into what you want in your life. What is really important in your life? What do you value most? You may want to make a list to note the things you want to keep and the things you should throw out of your life. You may even conclude that cutting back on work, although it might reduce your income, will actually improve the overall quality of your life. Does the extra money really buy you the things that are most important, especially when you don't have the time to enjoy them? (Could it really be true that the best things in life are free?)
 - **When in doubt, choose simplicity.** Our world presents so many possibilities that it is impossible to keep up with everything. Do we really need to watch every episode of a favorite TV show? Are our lives going to be any different if we stop watching the news every night? Do we really need a pager or a cellular phone? Rather than spending a fortune on entertainment or a night out, wouldn't a quiet night talking to a close friend at home be more meaningful? Do we need to give expensive gifts when a handmade greeting would convey the same message? The simpler choices allow us more time to get in touch with things that really matter.
2. Make a list of what you do like or did like about the holidays and focus there.
 3. Let go of what you think are other people's expectations. Do what will make you happy.
 4. Give your kids/spouse/partner the gift of time...and don't forget yourself.
 5. Create time for a holiday retreat: a few hours in a spa or even reading a book will help reduce stress.
 6. Get out of the kitchen...make reservations, get gourmet to go, do pot-luck, etc.
 7. Create a budget for the holidays and stick to it.
 8. Avoid the crowds. Instead of giving goods; give services. Most gift certificates for services can be bought online (spa, dinner, movies, etc) or make offerings of yourself in gift certificate form (a day together at a museum, babysitting for a weekend night, home delivered gourmet food, etc.)



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– **Move into the present.** Our lives become a melange of schedules and our thoughts seem to focus on what is “out there.” Our rhythms are determined by the pressured world we inhabit. We become more concerned with the “there and then,” and not with the “here and now.” A beneficial exercise is to make time throughout the day just to experience the moment. Immerse yourself in the present. Become aware of your internal state. At these times stresses can soften. Let this inner awareness, rather than the external frenzy, guide your everyday experience. This is the clue to learning about what is truly important in your life. Absorbing yourself in the present moment is exhilarating and can make you feel truly alive. Your internal knowledge is now the source of what controls your life, not the mundane pressures of the world around you.

– **Travel to the beat of your own drum.** Your body has its own rhythms. Learn what they are. Some of us are nightowls and some of us are larks (or morning people). Some of us have slumps in mid-afternoon. The value of being true to your body’s cadences is inestimable. Respect what your body is trying to tell you. All of nature follows a cyclical pattern (hot to cold, day to night, activity to hibernation). Humans have periods of productivity and energy followed by a need for rest. We need to cycle from doing to being.

Some of us have become so accustomed to adapting to the pressure of the external world that we have lost awareness of our internal state. The “high” that accompanies our adaptation to the stresses of modern life becomes something like an addiction. The busier we are, the more we feel alive. Yet our anxieties increase and we lose track of the experiences which truly matter. Our health deteriorates, our relationships become superficial, and our sense of our own self evaporates. We long for something meaningful and we lack the tools for finding it. The solution to the dilemma involves a paradox: we gain time by giving up time. This is the holiday season, a time for gifts. Plan a gift for yourself this holiday season: take control of the time of your life. After all, your emotional wellness matters.

9. Ask family and friends to not give you gifts.
10. Focus your kids around Christmas presence (values, religious meaning, etc.) instead of Christmas presents.
11. Remember, less is more.
12. Last, but not least...if you celebrate Christmas ...you can always skip the tree.

As I reflect upon the past year, I want you to know that it was an honor to work with each and every one of you. I look forward to our continued work together in the year to come. In closing, whatever is meaningful, whatever brings you happiness... may it be yours this holiday season and throughout the coming New Year.

Happy Holidays,
Jody

Give Yourself a Real Holiday Gift!

We rush around too much of the time, a pattern which is difficult to break. Try these simple ways of claiming your time as your own.

Can you get by without wearing a watch (or a pager)? Try it out for a day...and maybe much longer.

Drive 5 mph slower, and stay in the slow lane.

Eliminate watching the news on TV most of the week (it does increase your stress!), and listen to peaceful music instead.

Get in the longest grocery line and take your time just to watch the people and enjoy the experience.

Go somewhere by yourself (it doesn't matter where), and enjoy your time alone.

Focus completely on whatever task or activity you are doing without being distracted by anything else or other thoughts. This can happen whether you are washing the dishes, listening to a friend, or attending a meeting.

Try This Simple Exercise... Right Now

(This will only take a minute or so.)

- Stop whatever you are doing.
- Switch your focus from the external situation to your internal state.
- Close your eyes.
- Tell yourself: "I'm bringing myself into the present."
- Without changing the rate at which you are breathing, pay attention as you inhale and exhale. Each time you breathe bring your awareness more into your internal state.
- If you have any thoughts or hear sounds in the background, just let them go: focus only on your breathing and your body's natural rhythm.
- After a short time, go back to what you were doing.

(Now, try doing this several times a day!)

All About Us Biographies

Jody Michael, M.A., L.C.S.W. is founder and president of Jody Michael & Associates, a coaching consultancy that works one-on-one with individuals and small businesses to help them reach their career, executive, small business, and life goals.

She brings to her coaching practice over 15 years of corporate leadership in the finance industry, successful entrepreneurial ventures, teaching credentials, an M.A. and PhD studies from the University of Chicago, and more than eight years of practice applying clinical psychology principles to work-life, career, and business building issues.

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What's New?

How a Coach Can Help You

Whether your career is not quite where you'd like it to be, you're a small business owner in search of new ideas, or you're an executive reaching for the next rung, a coach can prove instrumental in helping you identify, accomplish, and achieve. Please refer to 'Client Case Studies' and read a few examples of how JMA coaches have helped their clients overcome obstacles and succeed.

Downtown Location

Continuing our tradition of offering comfortable and convenient locations for our clients, we announce the opening of our new downtown location at 405 N. Wabash. Solid natural materials and a birds-eye view of the Magnificent Mile create an ideal setting that prompts both relaxation and renewal. The ambience metaphorically reflects the new heights and perspective our clients achieve in their one-on-one work with us. Please call and schedule an appointment with us at this provocative setting today.

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