

# update

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Enthum Newsletter

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## dear friends & colleagues,

Welcome to **Update**, our regular newsletter. We value our connection with you and hope you find this edition interesting.

### **Time well Spent** - Lilliana Gibbs

*'Men talk of killing time, while time quietly kills them.'* - Dion Boucicault

We're all familiar with time management wisdom about how to be more efficient and organised. But it always seems to involve doing more; So I was delighted to read Stefan Klein's latest book, **Time: A User's Guide**, which explains why we feel stressed by time, and explores our fascinating relationship with time.

Time wasn't always valued as a commodity, it began in the industrial age, when workers were paid for the hours they worked. In the last 150 years, we have so successfully internalised the value of time that it dictates almost every aspect of our lives. Time awareness is ingrained, we're reminded of it everywhere, we just have to glance at our wrist.

Nowadays we're bombarded with unprecedented amounts of stimuli. To deal with it, we constantly notice, sort and skim information. This rapid pace is exciting, and addictive; our personalised phone ring, or the ping of a new email makes us feel alive. We've become used to being available anywhere, anytime, with the result that we are not able to pay careful and sustained attention to any one thing. Ours is a hurry mentality, we do two, three or more things at once, and believe this is what efficient looks like. But research shows this makes us *busy*, not *effective*. And deep down we know it, because it explains those tiring days when we don't actually achieve anything.

We'd all like to be organised, well prepared and on time. But unfortunately, a good intention is a very weak motivator, which is why most of us leave things to the last minute. Our brain's executive function is designed to constantly evaluate the most appealing options —we want the fastest gratification possible. Getting down to work on a report is less attractive than chatting to a colleague over a coffee, checking news headlines or reading emails. It's only when time is running short, that we get a rush from focussing on the task, because the reward for completion is closer now than it was yesterday, or last week.

When we can't manage all our tasks, we feel short of time. This makes us worry, and when we're stressed, it becomes increasingly difficult to organise time sensibly. Stress releases adrenaline into our blood, which slows down or shuts off the brain's executive function. Without an effective cognitive manager, we



become muddled and forgetful. And realising we can't think straight *really* makes us anxious, and we're in a perpetuating cycle.

The problem is not that a shortage of time makes us stressed; it's rather that *feeling stressed makes us short of time*.

We tend to think of time as something intrinsic. Either time is available, or it isn't. But time isn't just 'out there'; separate from us — it's also determined by our own internal process. Time — or our experience of time, is the interaction between our brain and external circumstances. If we're waiting for a computer programme to load, it feels slow, if we're running late, time goes fast. Our sense of impatience or anxiety is determined by our own perceptions. And we have some control over our experience. Understanding more about *why* it feels hard to get started in the morning, or to maintain focus on a project, or to unwind in the evening can be more useful than just recognising the symptoms. We can learn to improve our rapport with time.

### **1. Know your own rhythm**

Our body clocks are genetic, and affect our blood pressure and digestion, our energy levels and libidos - apparently even our handshake and patience levels. There is a right time for everything; it just won't be the same time for everyone. Accept that your rhythm may be different from your partner or your colleagues, and work with it. When we respect our natural rhythms, knowing when we're at our sharpest, we can better schedule our work to suit, and be more productive and satisfied - and healthier.

It's a curious fact that during the teenager years, our circadian rhythms shift to an evening/night pattern. Some US schools experimented by shifting school starting times by up to two hours. The results were dramatic; grades improved across the board and absenteeism reduced. The US Congress is considering a bill to reward schools that adopt a more sympathetic schedule.

### **2. Improve concentration**

Being immersed in a project is one of the greatest pleasures, but in responding to outside stimulus, we easily lose touch with our own rhythm. We have become habitual multi-taskers, and it takes effort to turn, and keep, our attention to one thing.

This all means we need to practice a new habit for it to become routine. If you were to take an early walk every morning for one month, your neurons would begin to develop new pathways, and slipping out of bed and into your sneakers would become easy, and automatic — particularly if you have a nice breakfast afterwards.

Make it a habit to allow uninterrupted time when you need to focus. Control external interruptions, but you may also need to manage your internal interruptions. One suggestion is to note down intruding thoughts and ideas, so you can attend to them later.

We need to be able to clearly visualise our goals in order to sustain the attention required to meet them. Then apply the 'salami principal' of dividing up tasks into manageable, bite size tasks, so there are multiple opportunities for progress and satisfaction.

### **3. Reduce stress and increase pleasure**

We have an internal see-saw; when stress is up, pleasure is down. So work on shifting the balance. Just moving your body will impact on your thinking and feeling. Exercise is proven to be one of the most effective ways of reducing stress; just getting outside and walking for 10 minutes will improve your mood.

Spend time with people you enjoy and make time for the things that give you pleasure. No one is recorded to have said on their deathbed *"if only I'd spent more time at the office"*.

We complain of not having time to switch off, but it may simply be that we've forgotten how to.

When we're stressed, simple pleasures like playing with the kids can become a chore. We feel we should be doing something more useful. Cultivate habits of relaxation, musing and imagining. Leisure is an underrated necessary and an effective emotional balancer. Sometimes, because we're

not thinking, our subconscious unveils gems —an insight or idea when we least expect it.

#### **4. Decide what is important**

We always have choices, yet it's easy to forget this and be carried along by what must get done. A simple guide is to check what will happen if I don't do X? The result may be critical, but sometimes the consequence is so minor, we would benefit from letting it go. This moment of consideration helps us to feel in control over our time, and that in itself is a positive, as we manage stress much better if we feel we have some control over events. Research shows that people who don't feel they manage their own time, are far more likely to experience a helplessness that causes stress, and they die earlier.

#### **5. Savour moments**

Cultivate your capacity to notice, to pay attention, to watch and listen. Training your attentiveness helps you stay focussed on the present, which stretches your perception of time and lifts your mood. Because our brains link attention and feeling, like pleasure and curiosity, we are happiest when wholly in the moment.

While we've become used to rushing and multi-tasking, it's clear that we don't work well under these circumstances. We achieve more when we attend to one thing, and we get more satisfaction and build memories when our attention is focussed. The world is not yet designed to suit the way our minds work, but we can change our relationship to time. Stefan Klein suggests we see it as a resource for organising our lives, rather than as *"a corset we have to squeeze into."*

*So much to do  
So little time  
We must go slow*  
- Anon

## **Coaching for Women**

*"I have discovered or revealed a part of myself that is here to stay"*

Lilliana's successful 5-month small group coaching programme provides the space, time and structure to reflect on specific life and work issues, and to understand underlying behaviour and response patterns.

New groups are starting in Sussex and London in November. Contact Lilliana for a brochure and more details [lilliana.gibbs@enthum.com](mailto:lilliana.gibbs@enthum.com)

*"The work went a lot deeper than I expected, being part of Lilliana's group helped me to reflect and face issues I have not found time and place to deal with before. I was able to be in a circle of woman and look at my own habits and realise I have other options, so it helped me to choose new ways of being in my work and in my relationships. I am so grateful for this time."*

— Maria

*"I now have a clearer understanding of why I am where I am in my professional life. The door is now open to a world where I can determine what I would ideally like to be doing, and where I feel able to actively seek challenge and embrace change"*

— Claire

*"I've gained inner strength over these past months, clarity in my thoughts, and as a result making changes and steps in my life quite gracefully but with big consequences. I feel working as a group made all the difference —especially such a small intimate one. It felt like as the saying goes, the sum of parts is greater than each added together, the lid was lifted for all of us."*

- Melina

## **Interesting finds we like to share:**

TED talks are inspiring, entertaining and educational talks from writers, scientists, artists among

many others. Amazing what can be shared in just 18 minutes. <http://www.ted.com/themes>

**We recommend** Sir Ken Robinson's entertaining and profoundly moving case for creating an education system that nurtures (rather than undermines) creativity.

[Click here](#)

### **Time: A User's Guide**

*Making Sense of Life's Scarcest Commodity*

By Stefan Klein PhD

Our modern lives are ruled by minutes and hours. We race from one thing to the next, believing at some level that a mysterious cosmic force called 'time' is ticking on. And it's in short supply. But could there be an alternative understanding?

And another gem from Dr Klein;

### **The Science of Happiness**

*How Our Brains Make Us Happy — and What We Can Do to Get Happier.*

By Stefan Klein PhD

An extremely well-written, easy to read and expertly researched book that explores the latest frontiers of neuroscience and psychology to explain how happiness is generated in our brains, what biological purpose it serves, and the conditions required to foster the 'pursuit of happiness'.

All best wishes,

**the Enthum Team**



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