

Begin Living in Real Time

by Jeff Davidson

In your quest to keep pace with all that's thrown at you, do you find yourself frequently preoccupied? It seems as if many accountants are in overdrive today. We don't enjoy the morning because we're always in a rush, concerned about getting to work on time. We don't enjoy our lunch, because we're worried about what's going to occur in the afternoon

or what needs to be done. We don't enjoy the afternoon, because we're thinking about how we have to pick up our children, get across town to attend a meeting, and then get back. We don't enjoy the evening, because it goes by too fast.



How would your life be if you had the ability to tackle problems and challenges as they arise? What would it feel like to engage in conceptual thinking whenever you wanted or needed to? What if you had a sense of control and ease about each day? If all these components were a part of your life, you would be living in "real time."

What it's like to live in real time

One accountant with a North Carolina association finds that a key strategy for effectiveness is taking phone calls as often as practical when they come in, rather than letting them pile up. By taking phone calls as they come in, she's able to interact with the party calling and is able to often resolve the issue during the call.

"When you let the number of return calls you have to make build up beyond a certain level," she says, "you ensure that you won't get back to all the callers, and you're going to procrastinate when it comes to calling many of them."

She also finds it useful to deal with mail and papers that come across her desk as they arrive, but concedes that this isn't always feasible. Concurrently, she knows the importance of keeping distractions at bay when she needs to focus on the task at hand.

Go for completion

An internal auditor at a shipping company in Southampton, United Kingdom, finds value in carrying a task to completion instead of leaving it for later when it might be one of a growing number of tasks that require additional effort.

He observes that even if it doesn't "feel good," sticking with the task at hand is one of the most effective ways of staying in real time and getting things off your desk, be it fielding a phone call, returning correspondence, or working on a budget.

You may know people who live in real time or who live out significant chunks of their life in real time. Who are these people? These are the people who stay in shape, have the time to take a phone call, and actually know the names of each of her children's friends. This is the person who volunteers for and takes an active role in community organizations.

Twelve components of living in real time

These are worthwhile achievements; elements of life within your potential. Take a look at the following twelve components of living in real time, with the realization that each of these is within your grasp.

1. Leave home in the morning with grace and ease. If you can manage the beforehand by taking care of as many things as possible the night before, in the morning, you only have to get bodies out the door. No need to have a mad rush, because you've got everything ready to go.

2. Focus on the important issues facing your organization, your department or division, and your job or career. You have to pay homage to the issues that you identify as important in your life and have the strength to ignore the less important. Magically, when you handle the important things, the others fall into place.

3. Handle and address the mail when it arrives, keep piles from forming on your desk, and handle phone calls within twenty-four hours. No need to be inundated by receiving too much mail, have piles that rise ever-higher on your desk, or have a mounting number of calls to return.

4. Enjoy a leisurely lunch. Know the importance of completing tasks so that when you go to lunch, you're at lunch. Take the time to chew slowly and carefully. Give up reading the newspaper and focus on the food in your mouth. Old sensations may return. You actually enjoy your lunch, digest your food better, and do better back on the job. What a deal!

Some insist on having lunch away from their desks. By getting away from the office, they're able to regenerate their batteries and focus on their work and how they'll approach it. They feel that when you stay at your desk too long, every task competing for your attention, big and small, seems urgent.

By getting away at lunchtime, they're able to stay focused on the big picture. They find that having the outside lunch enables them to return to the office with newfound energy.

5. Depart from the workplace at normal closing hours and feel good about what you accomplish each day. Leaving the workday on time is the single most important step toward permanently living in real time. When you use the magic phrase, "What do I need to accomplish by the end of the day to feel good about leaving on time?", you have little excuse for leaving in a bad mood.

6. Have sufficient and up-to-date health, life, disability, and automobile insurance coverage. If you want to live in real time, this is part of the overall picture. Getting adequate insurance to protect you and your loved ones is bound to be one of the goals that support your overall priorities.

7. File your income taxes on time. In any given year, nearly 40 percent of taxpayers seek an extension! You, on the other hand, once making the decision to live in real time,

know too well that taxes will always be around and completing your own tax returns on a timely basis yields peace of mind once you're done.

8. Take time to be with friends and relatives. People, not things, count most in life. Carve out time on your scheduling software or appointment calendar to ensure that you don't shortchange the key people in your life.

9. Stay in shape and at your desired weight. When you observe the bodies of most people, you can see the results of a losing tug of war with gravity – but gravity need not win. Fitness experts say that working out for only thirty minutes a day can keep you comfortably fit. As I observed in my book *Breathing Space: Living and Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-Up Society*, if you're too busy to stay in shape, you're too busy!

10. Make time for hobbies. On the way to losing your time, did you abandon enjoyable activities that were a part of what made you who you are? Revisit that stamp collection, your garden, the hiking club, or whatever you let slide. Living in real time means enjoying your most rewarding hobbies and pastimes on a regular basis.

11. Participate monthly in a worthy cause. It's not possible to give your time and attention to all worthy causes or even many worthy causes. Your life is finite regardless of how long you live. When you pick the one or two that matter most, and take action, you feel good about yourself and about how you're spending your time.

Some of the factors that increase the probability of your paying homage to these causes include: having to undertake little travel to participate; enjoying your co-participants; getting a psychological stroke when you participate (an internal reward); and receiving recognition for your efforts (external rewards).

12. Finally, drop back at any time, take a deep breath, collect your thoughts, and renew your spirit.

Related articles:

- [Constant Interruptions: The Bane of Accountants](#)
- [Too Much To Do, All the Time?](#)

About the author:

Jeff Davidson is "The Work-Life Balance Expert@," is a preeminent time management authority, has written fifty-nine mainstream books, and is an electrifying professional speaker. He is the premier thought leader on work-life balance issues and has been widely quoted in the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Christian Science Monitor, New York Times, and USA Today. Cited by Sharing Ideas Magazine as a "consummate speaker," Jeff believes that career professionals today in all industries have a responsibility to achieve their own sense of work-life balance, and he supports that quest through his website www.BreathingSpace.com