

## Living in the Present Moment

by Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

"If I could only get a little breathing space." How often have you had that thought or something similar lately? Probably all too frequently. Although you and I may not have met, I'll bet that:

- Your desk is piled high with papers.
- You continually find yourself racing against the clock.
- You're deluged with projects and tasks right now.



If so, you're far from being alone. Most people today feel pressed for time in our society of information and communication overload. One of the most effective ways to alleviate the constant sense of time pressure is by "living in the moment." What does living in the moment mean? It means living with vibrant expression and keen perception, with an intense awareness of what exists in your life. It's waking up each morning with the thought, "I'm alive and this day is only starting."

Living in the moment means being aware of your power in the present, it's not a recipe for accomplishment. It's observing the finely woven canvas of your life while you're also living it. It's giving yourself permission to be who you are. It's resting when you're tired. It's not having to strive. It's allowing yourself breathing space.

Living in the moment doesn't mean taking a Pollyannaish approach to life, pretending that all is well. All is never well with anyone, at least not for long. Living in the moment doesn't mean acquiring a facade. You don't have to greet everyone you pass cheerfully. Freed from the preoccupation that limits your experience of the present, however, you may *feel* like greeting everyone.

Living in the moment doesn't mean living for the moment or living to get to the next moment. It means total, unconditional acknowledgment that what is now is your life; that now is the only moment there is. It isn't that you can't work to change things. It's that right now, this is how things are. For most people, how things are isn't so bad, and how things can be is in reach.

Living for the moment doesn't mean "live for today" – a well-intentioned, but shortsighted philosophy. Some time management experts suggest pretending you only have six months to live. However, this exercise misses the mark. It would be silly to sell off your property and spend your savings if you have years left to live. Living in the moment encompasses the truth about your life.

It doesn't mean "get the most out of life;" there is no "most" to get. It doesn't mean "make every minute count" – an attitude which borders on obsessiveness.

### **Lost in the "Overglut"**

Although the concept of living in the moment is primal, it's needed now more than ever. Too few individuals have any experience or knowledge of living in the moment. It's lost among a flurry of activity and busyness. The overglut strangles it. Living in the moment remains one of the least understood, least addressed, and least used human capabilities.

Years ago, Alan Watts explored living in the moment in his book *The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety*. He observed that "human beings appear to be happy" when they have something to look forward to. Yet when that something arrives, "it's difficult to enjoy it to the fullest without some promise of more to come." The relentless quest to move on to what's next keeps you from fully enjoying what's here.

Preoccupation is elongated deliberation of what came before or what may be. Preoccupation with the past or the future blocks the experience of the present. Do you reminisce nostalgically about something or someone in your past even though back then, the experience wasn't nearly as pleasant? For reasons of adaptation, our memories retain positive elements of certain experiences selectively.

You fantasize about that boyfriend or girlfriend of several years ago with whom you knew there was no chance of having a successful relationship. Yet, you only partially experience the present with your spouse who's one of the most wonderful human beings you know.

A writer once remarked that after his father's death, his father's absence became much greater than his presence. "When he was alive," the writer said, "he wasn't especially present in my life. When I went about my business, I felt neither his presence nor his absence."

Longing for what you no longer have more strongly than reveling in what you do have is a guarantee for missing the present and all the magic it holds. Revel in what you have.

Often, when a parent dies, the surviving adult children are able to see the beauty and perfection of the parent's life. Yet it was there to see all along. So too, the beauty and perfection of your own life is always available for you to see.

Must five years pass before you regard today with fondness? Can you accept that right now your life is taking place? Can you shout for joy for no reason? Can you give your love unconditionally?

### **Back to the Present**

You can now embark on a quest to live in the moment. Professor Marshall McLuhan said, "there is absolutely no inevitably as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening."

Alice sat at her desk for yet another evening, inspecting what she had to finish before retiring. Out of nowhere, a great notion came to her: if she was ever to experience a complete, fulfilled, stress-free life, it would have to be moment to moment, and it would have to start right now. She could no longer pretend that her life would change when her desired future finally arrived. And, she realized that she couldn't store up relaxation or rest,

like squirrels storing acorns for the winter. Right now was everything. If right now wasn't fine, she would deal with it now.

Good or bad, the present moment is, in reality, all you have. It's the only point of power, the only moment in which action can be taken. Your ability to acknowledge and to live within it is a basic, satisfying human capability.

### **Blocked Experiences**

Living in the moment is the freedom to experience the essence and perfection of your life and what is now, even the aspects about now that you may not like – a stumbling block for many.

Each of us faces many obstacles to living in the moment and having a full experience of the present. Clinging to victim status helps one avoid personal responsibility for existing in the present. Paying homage to ritual, a form of reinventing the past, limits the options of the present. The way you've always done it has little to do with how you might choose to do it now. Too much noise can block your experience – you need some quiet. Also, drugs and alcohol block the present and offer distortions, and I suspect that perceived time pressure is the reason that legions of our society have turned to drugs and alcohol.

Failure to live in the moment condemns you to never feeling in control of your life. Life controls you rather than the other way around.

Accept the present moment as it is, and for what it is – the most important moment in your life. How fortunate if you're happy or content right now, because now has the greatest importance. Nothing else exists.

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### **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](http://www.BreathingSpace.com).*

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