



The Balanced Lawyer

Jeff Davidson

Are You Living In the Present Or Racing Toward The Future?

“If I could only get a little breathing space.” How often has that thought or a similar one occurred to you 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 are deluged with case work and office tasks.

If so, you are not alone. In our society of information and communication overload, most attorneys today feel time-pressed. One of the best 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 is not a recipe for accomplishment. It is observing the finely woven canvas of your life while simultaneously living it. It is giving yourself permission to be who you are. It is resting when you are tired, not having to strive, and allowing yourself breathing space.

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.

Here is an important distinction for attorneys: Living in the moment does not mean living for

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

Living for the moment does not 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 wind down your law practice, 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.

Finally, it does not mean, "get the most out of life;" there is no "most" to get. And it certainly does not mean, "make every minute count" — an attitude which borders on obsession, although we certainly do want to dispense our time wisely.

Lost In The "Overglut"

Although the concept of living in the moment is primal, it is needed now more than ever. Too few individuals have any experience or knowledge of living in the moment. It is lost among a flurry of activity — the briefs, the depositions, and the "busy-ness."

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*, and observed that "human beings appear to be happy" when they have something to look forward to. Yet when that something arrives, "it is 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 was not nearly as pleasant as you like to recall it? For reasons of adaptation, our memories selectively retain positive elements of certain experiences. 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 is 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. Celebrate the partners with whom you work each day.

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 available for you to see all along. Must five years pass before you regard today with fondness? Can you accept that right now your life is taking place?

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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 the case 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 could not store up relaxation or rest, like squirrels storing acorns for the winter. Right now was everything. If right now was not fine, she would deal with it now.

Good or bad, the present moment is, in reality, all you have. It is the only point of power, the only moment when you can take action. 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 that you may not like — a stumbling block for many. Certainly in the quest to build or sustain a law practice or a career, 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, also 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. And while drugs and alcohol block the present and offer distortions, I suspect that perceived time pressure is the reason that legions of our society have turned to these substances.

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.