

Making Friends with Time

Trying to force things to happen when and how we want leads to a lot of wasted energy and disappointing results. Remaining open and responsive to new insights and developments, rather than focusing on our strict expectations, can reveal new ways of pursuing success.

My friend Karen, a consultant who routinely travels three weeks a month, recently bought a timeshare: two weeks a year at a Maui resort. It has become the ideal refuge for her, a low-logistics place to decompress, recharge, and, with some judicious invitations, reconnect with far-flung family members.

I have a timeshare, too, but it's in my backyard. It's a dead tree whose top branches have been shorn by the wind. One day I looked out my window and noticed that jagged snag was hosting more than a dozen band-tailed pigeons. Months later, those doves had been replaced by a handful of adolescent sharp-shinned hawks. And I have to confess to a little superstitious shudder the day a turkey vulture weighed down each branch.

In short, I've come to think of the old tree as a timeshare for the birds, lodging different flocks in different seasons—none of which I'd noticed during the years when

I, like Karen, was a road warrior. Now I'm becoming aware of a relationship with time that doesn't follow the arbitrary dictates of a man-made clock but rather the more organic flow of lengthening/shortening days and continuously cycling seasons.

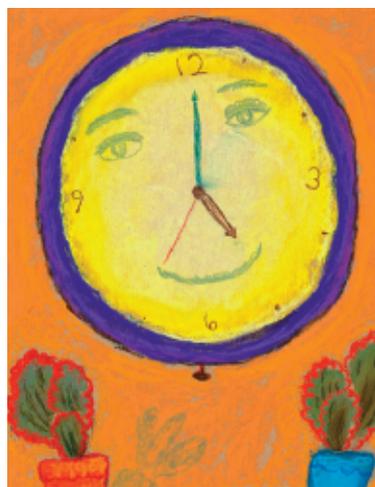
This spring, the question of time came into even sharper focus as my husband and I became innkeepers to some honeybees. We'd read news reports about the puzzling disappearance of bees from once-thriving hives. Since one of every three bites of food

Earth, humans would have only about four years before starvation would wipe out our species, too!

One possible factor is urbanization infringing on honeybee habitats. So the least we can do is provide accommodations on our hillside. A local beekeeper brought over two hives. Every day, my husband checks on them, amazed by how the bees' agenda is driven by natural forces that we take for granted: the sunnier the day, for example, the more active the bees. Our new guests have reminded me of remarks titled "Busy As a Bee," penned in this space a decade ago by the late Bob Gunn:

"It wasn't so long ago that being busy meant being productive. Just as the bee steadily goes about his (sic) business of gathering pollen, we humans were expected to go about our tasks calmly and productively. Our work explored things the same way a bee examines many flowers to find the one with the best pollen. Nights were a time for rest and regeneration with family and friends....

"Undoubtedly the phrase, 'If you want something done, then give it to the busiest person,' rings a bell. In truth, (such people) rarely describe themselves as leading hectic lives. Their secret is that



Americans eat depends on bees, "colony collapse disorder" inspires more than idle curiosity. Indeed, I've heard one estimate that if the last bee disappeared from planet

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they understand, sometimes instinctively, that living in an affirmative state of mind is the most important thing. They know that when they feel calm, their mental gateway to common sense and wisdom is wide open. In turn, this openness lets them see to the heart of the matter, gain perspective, and know exactly what must be done. They don't waste effort by spinning their wheels; they don't miss what is important because they are distracted, and they don't repeat themselves because they have forgotten what has already been done....

"If you find your mind abuzz with ever-greater urgency, ask yourself if this is what the bee hears. Perhaps what comes to mind will be a languid summer afternoon accentuated by the pleasant hum of the bees as they go about their business."

I would go one step farther: A significant difference between me and the bees is that I still want to impose my will on time, to be in control. Watching a bee move from blossom to blossom, collecting nectar or packing pollen in bright yellow "saddle bags" on her legs, I wonder: How much energy have I wasted trying to force things to happen how and when I wanted?

The worst hire I ever made happened because my boss insisted, "We have to have the new team leader by Tuesday. If you don't hire Jim, how are you going to make that happen?" As soon as Jim accepted my offer, my stomach clenched. But I swallowed hard and shook hands on the deal. The decision caused major staff disruptions and, within six months, cost our company close to \$40,000 in

Force time, and time will drive you back; yield to time, and time is on your side. – The Talmud

severance and write-offs.

Conversely, my most successful trade show fell into place on a day when I was too tired to run around looking for the four people I absolutely had to find among the tens of thousands of attendees. Instead, I parked myself in a convenient place and stayed vigilant. Within two hours, somehow all four of those people happened to walk by—or, at least, came close enough that I could pull them from the crowd.

So I now aspire to work *with* the natural flow. The hypothesis I'm testing: When I try to force things to happen according to expectations, I'm driving with one hand tied and one eye closed. Innocently, I'm limiting myself to the tiny part of my mind over which I exercise conscious control. If I can ease up on my mental gas pedal, I can become attuned to and access the unconscious but innate resources that Bob described—common sense, wisdom, perspective. My new model: Set a clear intention; keep it in mind, but stay alert to relevant insights and fresh possibilities. Avoid being reactive, fretting over difficulties; instead, be responsive as events unfold into new learning experiences.

I've become an observer of myself, getting a little breathing room from old habits by reflecting on these questions:

◆ When do I dislike something that is happening? Or like it?

- ◆ When do I feel neutral?
- ◆ When do I resist agreeing or going along with someone or something?
- ◆ Above all, what is it costing me to insist on my way? In terms of my physical well-being and energy, my emotional state, my relationships, my results? And what do I want to do about that?

In short, I aspire to give up *efforting* against a prescribed checklist for *allowing* an organic kind of progress toward what is fundamentally important. For example, I asked my husband to plant a rose garden so that, when guests came, I could fill vases for the front hall and dining table. Even though he planted dozens of bushes, they are bare during 40% of the year. Frustrated by my lack of ability to create the picture-perfect setting I imagined, I considered going so far as to convert a shed into a hothouse. Instead, I do something that I used to be too narrowly focused even to consider: I explore our property to see what's in season.

Sometimes my vases *are* filled with roses. But now they are just as likely to have daffodils or dahlias or ornamental berries or, sometimes, bare branches from a Cork Screw Willow, which, I've come to appreciate, lend their own kind of beauty.

I see this as making friends with time. **SF**

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