

I need to slow down. I'm movin' too fast. How can I do it?

By Bob Wilson BS, DTR

Notice that we live in an environment—modern American life—that is over busy and over stimulated. This contributes to restlessness and a feeling of depletion, compulsion and overwhelm. We are trained to multitask. It has come to feel like we are wasting time if we do nothing (rest) or if we just do *one thing* at a time. We also might find that we are *not enjoying the thing that we are doing* because we are always *rushing to the next thing* that has to be done on our list. We have become human *doings* instead of human *beings*. We have an addiction to technology and consumerism and have lost the ability to live life with wisdom, inner peace and enjoyment. To go SLOWLY in this society is to go “against the grain.”

Our collective choices (our minds) have created a culture out of balance.



To change the way one lives requires intention, courage and lots of practice. Peer and cultural pressure keep us on the “river of excess” for security to feel accepted. How can you get *unstuck*? Build up the confidence in yourself? First, **accept the responsibility for your present level of activities** (with no self-put downs) and **notice the results**. You can then see what changes you would want to make in the future.

Cultivate daily choices and insights that support balance.

Explore your rushing energy.

Write ideas on index cards and review:

- ✓ Pay attention to how it feels in your body.
- ✓ When you're stressed out, pause. Take some down time. Reflect on all of the things that you are currently doing right now in your life. Notice the *habit of mind* of feeling rushed and pressured. The mind gets addicted to the pressured state. We run on adrenaline.
- ✓ You can ASK yourself: Do you need to do this thing? Really? When you make an appointment, when you get in the car—be deliberate about it. Prioritize and simplify?
- ✓ What would happen (inside) if you didn't *choose to do* all these things? Example, choose to do *some things* versus *all things*? Would your mind be more calm and peaceful? Centered?
- ✓ Leave lots of time in your schedule so you don't feel anxiety and pressure to get somewhere.
- ✓ We all feel like we are “so busy.” Our lives are living us. We feel that we don't have a choice. We feel like a victim. Notice what we say to ourselves: “I'm so busy because I *have to do* something.” Versus “I *choose to do...*” Ask: What effect does this change in focus have on

your mind? Does it make you feel calmer and less pressured? Does it make things feel more like *opportunities versus obligations*?

- ✓ Notice a voice that says, “not fast enough!” (an addiction to accomplishment). Look at the emotions underneath: terror, unworthiness, loneliness, aversion and desire (running away from pain or compulsively towards something)
 - ASK yourself: Why am I hurrying? What am I feeling? Do I need to slow down? Am I having fun and enjoying what I am doing? Do your *brain and heart* dream up commitments that your *body can't keep*?
- ✓ **Where do you get stuck in making priorities? Check the underlying motives:**
 - “I have to do it” versus “I choose to do it?”
 - A deep desire to be of service?
 - People’s requests?
 - Perfectionism?
 - Professional/job requirements?
 - People pleasing? Fear? Care about other people’s perception of me?
 - Praise/recognition/expectations? Do I communicate my limitations?
 - Feeling important? My role is critical! “I see myself as a responsible person, therefore I have to...” (To fit my image of who I am.) “I’m so important, I have to...”
 - Buying into societies values?
- ✓ Accept yourself with your limitations. You’re NOT a project to be changed. You can change through the process of awareness and self-acceptance, NOT by pushing and punishing yourself. Face your present lifestyle imbalance with gentleness and joy! Congratulations, you noticed! You now CAN practice making changes.

Do less. Enjoy what you do more. How?

- ✓ Just don’t do something. Sit there! Have unscheduled time. Practice slowing down and doing nothing every day. Practice useless gazing. Really, *observe* the world around you. You will probably feel uncomfortable at first. Choose to act *outside of* your normal routines.
- ✓ **Notice (be mindful of) what you are doing with each of your daily activities:**

When you wake up	Notice your “hungers”—for food, rest, affection, accomplishment, and nurturing activities
As you get ready for work	When you go for a walk
When you use the toilet	While you talk on the phone
While you brush and floss your teeth	As you drive your car
As you wash your hands	When you grocery shop or do errands
When you take out the garbage	As you turn on the TV—also notice how <i>what you see</i> effects your emotions
Be present as you wash dishes or clean up the kitchen	Be deeply present as you meet others
Notice the sensations as you drink coffee or tea	When you get sleepy, celebrate your blessings of a comfortable place to lay your head
Be present when you hug someone	
Notice how your breakfast and other meals taste	
- ✓ **Pay attention.** Don’t just do your activities on *autopilot*. Have a sense of the sacredness of your life. Your life is rich and valuable. Celebrate your wild and precious life!

- ✓ **Resist rushing.** An example from Thich Nhat Hanh’s book *Present Moment Wonderful Moment* (mindfulness verses for every day life) and *Peace Is Every Step* deal with driving, something that most of us do every day.

When we are driving, we tend to think of arriving, and we sacrifice the journey for the sake of the arrival. But life is to be found in the present moment, not in the future...each mile we drive, each step we take, has to bring us into the present moment. When we see a red light or a stop sign, we can smile at it and thank it, because...it is helping us return to the present moment. The red light is a bell of mindfulness. We may have thought of it as an enemy, preventing us from achieving our goal. But now we know the red light is our friend, helping us resist rushing and calling us to return to the present moment where we can meet life, joy, and peace.

Another excellent book is *Practicing The Power Of Now* (pages 21-23, 30-38) by Eckert Tolle. See also, *The Beginner’s Guide To Insight Meditation*, (pp. 157 – 161), by Arinna Weisman.

Explore alternatives to your present schedule.

How do you spend your time?

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

How do you fit in: house cleaning and maintenance, family (husband, children, elderly parents), friends, gardening, job and travel time, professional commitments, spiritual connection, volunteering, shopping for daily needs, grocery shopping, fixing food, time for exercise, recreation, paying bills, watching TV, computer, e-mails, 12-Step or other support groups, time to do nothing (practice useless gazing)?

- ✓ Make a list and figure out the approximate time that each task requires.
- ✓ Will your “to do list” fit in 24 hours? Fit in 7 days a week? Can you really get it ALL done without going crazy or feeling overwhelmed?

Earlier in my life, I did this evaluation and found that I needed 9.5 days per week to accomplish all that I was doing each week. I was astounded. I finally understood WHY I was so stressed out and overwhelmed. At that time, I was drinking alcohol and using drugs to help me cope. I noticed that I needed to do something different.

- ✓ To make changes, the first step was to observe that my present pattern was harmful to me. I learned about my patterns and how they affected me by keeping a journal.

Explore your present lifestyle patterns and their consequences:

Here's what I learned about my patterns and their consequences.

Taken from my journal on February 22, 1992:

What I've learned:

1. My body and emotions have specific, definable limits.
2. When I spend all of my energy at work, there isn't much time or energy left over for friendship and fun.
3. I become ill.
4. I overeat.
5. I become depressed, exhausted, and enraged.
6. These results are NOT fun!

On one other occasion, I learned about *personal boundaries* when **someone requests something of me**.

1. I get asked to do something that will push me beyond my limits.
2. I feel guilt.
3. I want to please, to help out.
4. I want to be MORE than human. I don't like having limits!
5. Great distress spirals into depression, anger and compulsive choices.
6. OOPS, these results aren't fun either!

Through keeping a journal, I discovered my patterns and gained knowledge about the consequences of my daily choices. I then contemplated OPTIONS. What could I do differently? As I pruned back my life, how would this choice help me? I sought out the help of a counselor to advise me and help me sort through options. I rehearsed limit-setting messages and new ways of responding.

- ✓ The next step was to come up with a PLAN to do something different. My schedule was "all work and no play time". Taken from my journal:
 1. Cut back on my professional and work commitments.
 2. Take time for daily meditation and Dharma reflection and study
 3. Set my Bodichitta motivation for my life. Practice Tonglin for all beings who like me are overwhelmed and perhaps harming themselves or others.
 4. On Tuesday afternoon get a massage
 5. On Tuesday evening go to a comedy club
 6. When I get my paycheck, I will put no money in savings or giving to others. It is to ALL to go for FUN! I tend to be over responsible and pay all of my bills first, before I allow myself any fun. A note: I usually pay all my bills off as I go. I rarely use credit to fund my householder needs. I also do frequently give to various charities. In this season of my life, I had gotten out of balance.
 7. I will call up several friends and go out for dinner.

I actually followed through with the above plan. After awhile, with lots of practice, I was able to change how I spent my time. My life gradually came back into a healthful balance. Ah. My mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health improved.

One KEY to my ongoing well-being is and my daily Dharma practice, going to my Dharma center regularly for classes, and my commitment to quarterly Dharma retreats. I found that I "deplete my sanity reserve bank account" if I go too long without a 3 – 10-day retreat and other PRECIOUS Dharma support. I find that, over time, I become more reactive to the world around me, I begin to lose perspective (of mindfulness, emptiness and remembering my motivation). To help me keep perspective about what my life is about, I remember that really own nothing. I am a steward of

everything in my life. My deepest aspiration is that my life may benefit all beings and lead them to Enlightenment (I'm also included as one of those beings). For me, the Triple Gem has been the precious key that has unlocked my inner prison of despair, self-hatred, ignorance and disturbing attitudes. It provided me a wonderful opportunity to be of service to others. It has also helped me keep off 250 pounds off of my body for 31 years and be drug and alcohol-free for 16 years, and be sane on most days! I AM PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL! Yay, whoopee! Venerable Chodron has been my teacher since 1996 when I took refuge at Cloud Mountain Retreat Center.

I still have to watch and be vigilant. I still have *tendencies* to get over committed. **My brain and heart still can make commitments that by body can't keep!** When this happens, I laugh at myself, say, "Oh, Bobby sweetheart, here we go again. I love you. What do you think you want to do differently? Any ideas?" I then PAUSE. I REFLECT ON all of the ideas that I have just shared with you. I come up with a plan and makes changes. My life then comes back into balance. Yay!

So, how about you? I encourage you to explore your present lifestyle patterns and their consequences. Notice what happens for you. Come up with a plan. Try out baby steps towards a new, healthier and more balanced life. Have fun and enjoy your journey.

An excellent resource on this area is *Take Time For Your Life* by Cheryl Richardson. See also *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen Covey (The sharpening the saw section).

Questions and reminders that I used after reflecting on these ideas; I came up with my *personal maintenance schedule*—what do I need to be a healthy, happy camper?

Consider the aspiration: May I free my heart and all beings from suffering.

Contemplate the 6 Far Reaching Attitudes:
Generosity, wisdom, ethics, concentration, joyous effort, and patience.

What had I learned from this exercise?

How can I integrate this into my life to change my future?

Remember DAILY, to rearrange my lifestyle according to what is important.
What ongoing choices will I make?

Have realistic expectations.

Persistence pays off. You create your world through your choices. Think about what you want to create for yourself and what daily choices will bring that to you. Take the time. **Nurture the 9-P's:** prioritize, plan and prepare, practice, persist with patience, apply positive and powerful problem solving!

Take Action! Worksheet for Your New Life:

Sunday 24 hours	Monday 24 hours	Tuesday 24 hours	Wednesday 24 hours	Thursday 24 hours	Friday 24 hours	Saturday 24 hours

This life is about CHOICES. Learn about where your and other people's choices lead us. Towards well-being and harmony? Or, towards disease? Over time, healthy choices form healthy habits.