



## How to Live Longer Easily, Really!

It's not clock-time that defines the length of your life,  
it's the total experience of what you put in it.

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“Arise! Awake!” — **Swami Vivekananda**, philosopher and sage

“Fill your brain with giant dreams, so that it has no room for petty pursuits.”  
— **Robin Sharma**, coach and management consultant

Just as you sometime have lucid dreams, or think that you're lucid in a dream, you can have moments of lucid wakefulness. We tend to overlook these because they're disruptive. They disturb the normal, sleepy, flow of things. Like a blast of adrenaline, moments of lucidity can leave us disoriented, so we shoo them away.

I recently had a moment of waking lucidity. It lasted almost one second, but it was quite memorable. In that one second I noticed half a dozen things: the objects on the table, my schedule for the day, what I might eat for breakfast, and a desire to simply sit down and take a break. When that second had passed, it reminded me that the pace of my life depends on the clock speed of my mind.



## Space Is Not Just What's Around You

Time is one of those ridiculously immersive things that we entirely ignore. We're aware of events and changes, but not of time's own texture. More importantly, we're not aware that we have some control over its passage. But what is "it"?

Time is not a thing. One cannot extract, present, circumscribe, or remove time any more than you can cut out a block of space. There is nothing there to remove and, if you could, there would be nothing that you could put in its place. Time is not a thing because time is nothing, just like space: nothing but an empty container.

Things exist in time and space. Matter is one of the things, and we are another. The amount of space you take up is set by your boundaries. Our spatial boundaries seem

indisputable, but they are not as clear as you think. Your sense of boundary is mostly one of sensation, and when sensations are released, your boundaries widen.

Your boundary is not your skin, it's the sensations of your skin. When you are near a table, your eyes tell you when the boundary approaches or, if you're not looking, your toes. But when you're near a hot object, the boundary is not delineated. Instead, you find a comfortable position in proximity to the heater. Sound is similar, as we move in relation to what's comfortable.

Sex is interesting because it's a multi-modal experience. We move toward or away from the prospect of it according to our thoughts, emotions, vision, touch, memory, and spirit. Sex is definitely an event and a thing, but it's poorly contained. All the things that are important to us are poorly contained. They are larger than our ability to contain them.



## Human Time Is Not Linear

Human time is not one-dimensional. It's not clock time, it's experiential time. Our bodies sort of follow clock time, but we age differently and different parts of us age at different rates. We make the mistake of equating personal time with physical time. We measure the duration of our lives as the difference in time between our birth and death.

The fallacy of this is made evident by simply recalling any person's life and thinking of it

in terms of the number of years they've been alive. This means and tells us almost nothing. It may give us a picture of what they looked like when they died, as young or old people, but it provides absolutely no measure of human experience. The age at which you will die should mean nothing!

You might think the point I'm heading toward is the value of your life, and that your measure grows with your value. That's an interesting idea, but it's not where I'm going. I insist that the measure of your life is the amount that you notice within it. And "what you notice" is a slippery thing because, most of the time, you notice little and remember less. I claim that the measure of your life is both the amount you are involved with at any instant, and the "breadth" of your involvement with events as you move through time.

Last week, Art Markman, a psychologist at UT Austin, published a piece in Fast Company that encouraged you to avoid distractions in order to increase your span of attention (Markman, 2023). He made the connection that our proclivity to distraction lowers our span of attention. I think that's an anemic picture of our temporal experience.

We are distracted because we want to be involved. Human beings are attention magnets in the way that squirrels are situationally obsessed. It's our privilege, being on the top of the food chain, that we can be distracted by shiny or interesting thing around us. We're sort of like crows, who are especially attracted to shiny objects.

This proclivity is a strength, but it has the downside that it fragments our attention. Most of what we attend to is hardly worth the effort. Most of what we do with our minds is a waste of our time. You would not really be distracted if you were thoroughly satisfied with what you were doing at the moment. The reason you're distracted may not be because your attention is weak, but because your life is meaningless.

## What Does It Mean To Make Time?

There is no "time" that can be made longer, and there isn't any more room for things to happen in time. Time is full, and we cannot overfill it. Where would we put the extra? But we do have choices: we can alter what time is full of, and we can choose in time what we attend to.

If you want to be more efficient, focus on the task at hand. If you want to be happy, focus on what's meaningful. And if you want to live longer, then expand your focus and become more involved with living. I suspect that being efficient and living longer work at cross

purposes.

I'm not talking about time per se. I presume your time on earth will be the same no matter how you use it. That's a somewhat ridiculous approximation, but it's true within normal bounds. I take it for granted that you are not going to drive yourself crazy or work yourself to death. You might, and that's another issue, but at least in those periods where things are normal you can decide what you will fill your life with.

The point is, the more you do in time, the more time you'll perceive there to be: doing more makes for a longer life. I could say "bigger life," but big is a spatial dimension and long is another word for duration.



## Fit More Space Into Less Time

Multitask. This word comes from computation, and it means running several processes at once. There are two kinds of multitasking, and computers must be designed specifically to engage in either of them. We can do either or neither.

One kind of multitasking is doing multiple things simultaneously. Computers that have multiple central processors can do this. We sort of can because we have many layers of central processors and some of them run independently. But we only have one level of highest awareness, and that only handles one task at a time.

We have many levels of subsidiary awareness, and we recognize this in a person who is situationally aware. They're aware of what's going on outside of their focus of attention, and this is a learned skill. It's not the same as being multiply involved, but is a necessary prerequisite for it. The chess master who plays 30 matches at the same time achieves a kind of situational awareness. This is both a combination of short-term memory and flexible focus of attention. The pilot who keeps watch on events in the sky all around them, navigates, is aware of the air's movement and the plane's performance is situationally aware.

The more situationally aware you are, the less processing power you have for focusing your attention on one task. Situational awareness comes at the expense of exclusive engagement. This is why in hypnotherapy, I work to undermine a person's situational awareness. Our natural level of situational awareness precludes our ability to become internally immersed. You can't lose yourself in sleep or trance if you're worried about your safety in the physical world. As I must always tell people, "Do not engage with hypnosis and the control of heavy machinery at the same time!"

Situational awareness is one way of fitting more things into less time, but it's somewhat ambiguous because the situations of which you can be aware are not obvious. In fact, when they are obvious, the situations are often the least interesting and of less personal meaning. Being hyper aware of controlling your airplane or winning your chess matches does not really mean shit on the scale of human experience. On the other hand, not paying attention to your airplane or, more commonly, your car can easily get you killed. If you engage in any high-risk sports, you know what I mean. Hyper focus can feel tremendously empowering, but its feeling of meaningfulness comes more from its deep texture and not from its significance.

I recall various periods of hyper awareness while snowboarding, flying, and mountaineering. Often these were times of fear, as fear will do that. Fear will focus you like nothing else, and this is a clue. There are certain chemicals which, when released in your brain, give you almost superhuman abilities to see wider, faster, and more deeply. This is exciting and, like crows attracted to shiny things, we're attracted to exciting things.



## Creating Your Own Adrenaline

You can create your own adrenaline in your brain, and you can create it voluntarily. Actually, adrenaline is created on top of your kidneys, but those glands work in conjunction with your brain. You can think them into activity. You don't need to be skidding toward a guard rail or jumping out of an airplane. You can excite yourself using your mind alone, and you can feel yourself expand. But beware, it can be exhausting.

Exercise is important. Make sure you don't become too sedate, as this contracts your mind. You speed up your mind by engaging with things. Even if you simply tour around your kitchen, you must exercise your senses in order to keep your brain networks flexible. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," as the movie *The Shinning* reminded us. The real problem is monotony, doing all the same of anything makes you dull.

Don't read too much, write too much, worry too much, work or relax too much, exercise too much, eat, sleep, laugh or cry too much, feel too far above or below it, run around or sit still too much. Don't think, watch, talk, or succeed too much, but try to do some of all of these things. Then, feel for yourself how they work together and can keep all parts of your mind active.

Memory is most important. It is not, as you might believe, something that pertains to the

past. Memory is what you decide to remember about your future. That is what you have control over. Try to remember what you find yourself engaged in. Make your memory meaningfully full.

Make this an exercise: at the end of each day, reflect on what you remember. If you remember a lot of unimportant minutiae, it will shortly be forgotten. A week filled with minutiae is a week that will soon be forgotten, a forgettable month, and a year wasted.

My moment of lucidity reminded me of how I could see more or less in any moment, and I how I valued time would depend on what I filled it with. Some people grow old and fill their lives with grandchildren. I'm happy to say that as I grow old I'm filling my life with complicated people and their struggle for meaning. Their problems, situations, and solutions are meaningful to them and interesting to me.

I find the experiences I share with my clients become guideposts for living, partly because of what they learn to avoid and partly because of what they learn how to accomplish. I am somewhat an observer but also a participant. I'm like a coach who works to get people to do their best at what's most important to them. The exquisite interest in psychotherapy is that what's best or most important to a person maybe unique to them, and often strange and inscrutable.

My client this morning said, "After our meeting, this thing happened that was bad..." and I said, "Rephrase it as good: say that what happened after our meeting was good, but don't feel obliged to say why. Just let it sit unresolved and wait to see new possibilities. What you're looking for you can't yet see, so be patient and see nothing. There is no need to understand from the old point of view. There is no need to understand from any point of view."

If you can do this, defer applying any point of view, then much more becomes potentially interesting and relevant, and you will see and remember much more. If you avoid being efficient and effective and being the person you regularly are, then you will find that you can become a much larger person. This is one reason that time seems to move so quickly for old people, and much more slowly for young people. They have not yet decided on who they are, so their world is more filled with relevant events.

To make time move more slowly, return to being a younger person. Return to being young and you will live much longer!





“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.”  
— **Pablo Picasso**, painter

## References

Markman, A. (2023 Apr 25). How to train your brain to increase your attention span, *FastCompany.com*. Retrieved from: <https://www.fastcompany.com/90883434/how-to-train-your-brain-to-increase-your-attention-span>

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