

Reflections on Leadership



About Time

May 2019

As might be expected, I have been thinking a lot about the passage of time lately. The recollection of my 47 year career with Presbyterian Senior Living is rich with detail. When my memory fails me as I try to remember the name of someone I met last week, I can still recite the names and room numbers of the first residents of the nursing center that was my initial assignment as a nurse for Presbyterian Homes. This past week I met a 100+ year old PSL resident who I had originally known as a neighbor in Mount Joy back in 1971. The passage of time had not dimmed our shared recollections of the neighborhood and my frequent visits to their pharmacy on Main Street.

As a child I remember time passing very slowly. A casual phrase from my mom, “wait for a while” was like being sentenced to an eternal waiting room. The feeling of getting out of school for the summer as a youth carried a sense of freedom like no other – mostly because the summer months stretched before us like an endless road. There were a few exceptions to the slower time of childhood. “Wait till your father comes home” seemed to speed up the clock substantially.



Cecil Runyan, my 80+ year old business mentor from nursing school days had an understanding of the perception of the passage of time. “Young man, if you want to experience a short winter - borrow money that you have to repay in the springtime.”

Time is an interesting thing. We may not know how many days we will live on this earth, but we are all given the same number of hours in each day. I have read a number of books on the life of Teddy Roosevelt, and the record of his relatively short life is nothing



less than astonishing. In addition to being the youngest US president at age 42, he served as a New York State Assemblyman, New York City Police Commissioner, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Governor of New York, and fought in the Spanish American War. As an author of more than 40 books, he is regarded as the most well-read US President, reading at least 3 books every day in English, German, French, Italian and Latin. A noted naturalist, he was the driving force behind the National Parks that remain an enduring legacy to this very day. He also was the winner of the Nobel peace Prize in 1906. His face is one of 4 American presidents featured on Mt. Rushmore. This highly abbreviated list of his accomplishments in 60 years of life would suggest that

he had access to more than 24 hours in a day. But we all get the same time allotment at the beginning of each day. Some people just seem to get more accomplished in their 24 hours than others.

Time is a constant that can only be appreciated when measured against a fixed target. The sun moves at the same speed across the sky throughout the day. But we only gain an appreciation of the rate of speed at sunrise or sunset, when we can observe the movement of the sun against the horizon. When people gather at the edge of a body of water at the close of the day to watch the sun go down the speed of time slipping away is crystal clear.

Faithfulness over time is something that I have always greatly admired. This month I am privileged to present a 55 year service pin to John Bumbaugh, a member of the maintenance staff at Quincy Village. According to our files, John had perfect attendance for 45 consecutive years. Both are records for Presbyterian Senior Living. Being humble to the core, John does not brag about such accomplishments. He once told me that he did not feel like coming in every day in that 45 year stretch, but he felt that he was needed at work and that the residents depended on him. John is one of PSL’s many heroes who make the PSL mission come alive every day.

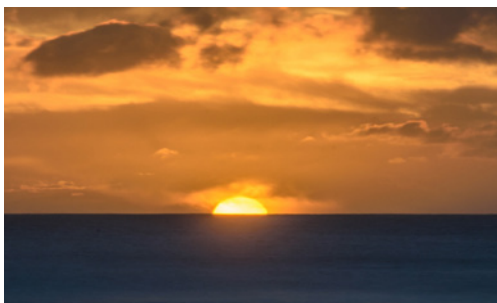
There is a spiritual aspect to time and how we choose to spend it. In verse 12

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of the 90th Psalm we read “*Lord teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*”. There is great wisdom in knowing that time is not a limitless commodity. How we choose to spend the time available to us can be an overly casual decision if we think of time as being unlimited. The truth is that every day we spend the hours we have been given by our Maker. Acknowledging this reality will help us to make wise choices about how we spend each minute.

Leaders make more timely decisions when they are aware of the precious nature of time. Procrastination or excessively slow decision making is the mortal enemy of those who are charged with leading organizations. My favorite quote from Earnest Hemmingway’s classic book “*The Sun Also Rises*” illustrates this point. “*How did you go bankrupt? In two ways, gradually, then suddenly.*” The gradually part is usually marked by inaction and the passage of time. Leaders who are slow to recognize gradual changes in their environment risk being suddenly overtaken by events. Choosing the right time to do something is critical to success. The ancient Greek poet Hesiod observed that “*for right timing is in all things the most important factor*”. Waiting too long or jumping the gun can be disastrous.

In the third chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes we read familiar words that convey a powerful message about how there is an appropriate time for things to happen in various seasons of life.



There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

*a time to be born and a time to die,
 a time to plant and a time to uproot,
 a time to kill and a time to heal,
 a time to tear down and a time to build,
 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
 a time to mourn and a time to dance,
 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
 a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
 a time to search and a time to give up,
 a time to keep and a time to throw away,
 a time to tear and a time to mend,
 a time to be silent and a time to speak,
 a time to love and a time to hate,
 a time for war and a time for peace.*

As I looked through the various events referenced in the above verses, I would add - A time to hold fast, a time to change, a time to begin, a time to retire.

Having a perspective on the value of each moment and the use of time is connected to finding meaning in life. In his book “*When, The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*”, Daniel Pink has observed that “*The challenge of the human condition is to bring the past, present, and future together. We need to integrate our perspectives on time into a coherent whole, one that helps us to comprehend who we are and why we are here.*” I think that Pink is right. We all know people who have been trapped in the past, controlled by present circumstances (sometimes called the tyranny of the urgent), or preoccupied with dreams of future possibilities. When we bring the past, present and future together in a balanced perspective life can take on new meaning.



A few final thoughts on the use of time -

- Give time to those around you who are less fortunate – being generous is the natural response to the realization that everything you have is a gift from God.
- Invest time in building relationships – the future dividends will be immensely satisfying.
- Savor the time you have been given – time should be thoroughly enjoyed and never be wasted.

Next month’s issue of Reflections on Leadership will be my final one as CEO of Presbyterian Senior Living. It has been my privilege to share these musings on leadership and life. After nearly 14 years I am still surprised and encouraged to know that there are people inside and outside of the PSL family who read this monthly column and find these thoughts to be useful in their leadership journey.

Blessings,

