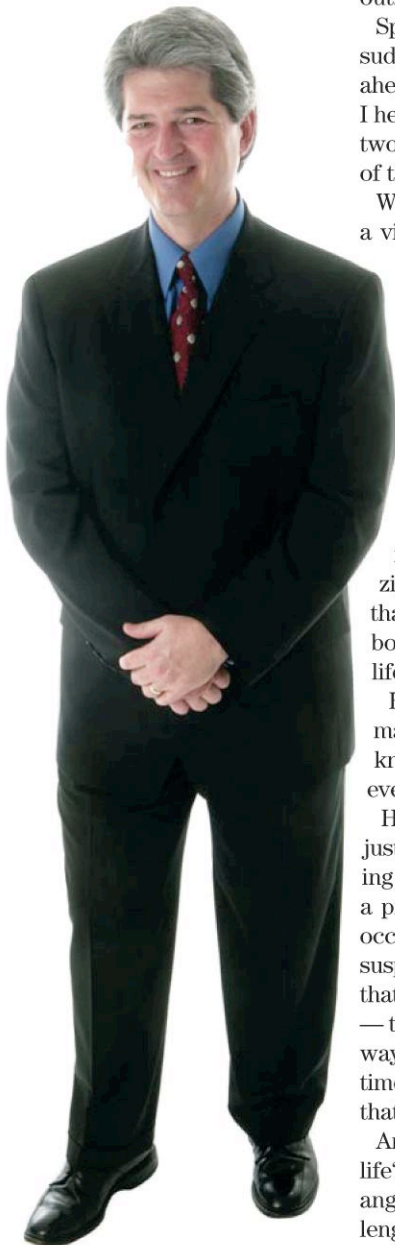


Creating your own crisis?

Control your pace to raise the quality of your work.



I was already late when I left the office heading for the airport. My flight was the last one of the day that would enable me to have dinner with an important client in a distant city, and I had to make it.

Driving well above the speed limit, I could feel my hands tighten around the steering wheel. My pulse was throbbing in my temples as the stress of the possibility of missing my flight began to rise. When another driver attempted to cross over into my lane, I accelerated to close the gap between my car and the one in front of me, blocking him out.

Speeding around a curve in the highway, I suddenly saw a sea of red brake lights ahead, forcing me to a complete stop. Soon, I heard sirens and saw the flashing lights of two ambulances racing down the shoulder of the highway.

When I finally reached the accident, it was a vision of total devastation. One car was overturned, and several others lay crumpled at odd angles, while emergency personnel hurried from one injured person to another.

Staring in shock at this terrible tragedy, I witnessed a scene I had experienced many times on television but never in reality. Barely 20 feet in front of me, two emergency workers lifted the body of a man and placed him into a long, white bag. They pulled the zipper from foot to head with a slowness that seemed almost reverent, closing the body within it, and closing the journey of a life.

Even as the shrill command of a policeman's whistle forced me to drive on, I knew that image would stay with me forever.

Had the man in that bag been in a hurry, just as I had? Was he driving too fast, dialing his cell phone or mentally distracted by a problem at work when his last moment occurred? I'll never know. But I will always suspect that it was the same frenzied pace that I felt — the same urgent need to hurry — that created the devastation on that highway. Except for a few minutes' difference in time, and the miracle of grace, the man in that bag could have been me.

Are you always hurrying through your life? Is your pace so urgent that you become angry at the smallest delay, such as a lengthy traffic light or a customer in front of

you counting out exact change to pay? If so, then here are two questions you should consider.

Are you creating your own crisis? On that day, making my flight was so urgent that I felt compelled to drive dangerously, but it was a crisis I had made myself by squeezing in one additional meeting before I left. Today, I can't even remember what that meeting was about, but the urgency it created could have cost me my life.

Instead, why not plan adequate time for the things you need to do and leave a small buffer between commitments for the unexpected? As radical as this may sound, you will actually get more done by remaining in a calmer, more focused state than you will by rushing frantically from commitment to commitment.

Are you always distracted? Constant multitasking only creates the illusion of productivity, not the results, while adding extra stress.

I recently received a call from a colleague about a complex financial spreadsheet. In the background, I could hear the sounds of a crowd cheering. When I asked, he told me he was at his daughter's soccer game and how important it was to her that he was there to watch her play.

I realized this man was sitting in the stands with his laptop open, discussing an issue on his cell phone, while believing he was fulfilling an important commitment to his child. The sad truth was that both his work and his daughter received less than his best that day.

The commitments you make and the people to whom you make them are essential elements in creating the life you want to live. Slow down enough to give them the time and the undivided focus they deserve, and you will find that both your work and your relationships reach a new level of success and fulfillment.

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