

# People's Views On Time Affect Health, Wealth, Relationships

*By Marilyn Elias, USA TODAY*

Our attitudes toward time shape every part of our lives, and yet few recognize how this subtle fact can sabotage careers or vault them skyward, wreck marriages and make people happy (or not), suggests a book in stores today.

The Time Paradox: The New Psychology of Time That Will Change Your Life (Free Press, \$27) by Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd, research manager at Google, is not a time-management book.

In fact, the one-size-fits-all approach of self-help books often fails because it ignores different time perspectives that really drive how people live, Zimbardo says.

After surveying more than 10,000 adults over the past 30 years, he and Boyd have identified six ways in which people view time. Nobody has only one way of viewing time, but how high or low you rank in each category is linked to your odds of being happy, mentally healthy or successful, he says.

There's one timeless truth about time: It's a major problem for people.

"Not enough free time together" is the top source of stress in marriage, above finances and sex, according to more than 2,000 people who took an unscientific USA TODAY online survey in July; it also ranked first in a nationally representative, scientific poll 21 years ago commissioned by the paper. Life is busier this year than last, about half said in both polls, and nearly all respondents said they craved more time with friends and family.

## But would it be happy time?

"Mismatches" between people who view time differently are common in marriages, Zimbardo says. When future-oriented spouses clash with mates who live mostly for fun in the present, "you hear 'He's irresponsible' and 'She's a slave-driver,'" he says. Trouble can erupt over how to

spend money, free time or vacations and how to raise kids.

Many ambitious middle-class families are future-focused because they want their children to have a good future.

Ann Adams, 43, an architect in Colorado Springs who has two boys, rises at 4 a.m. and goes non-stop till late at night, she says. She takes conference calls in the car as she drives the kids, who are on six different teams, to athletic events. "I threaten them with their lives if they don't stay quiet on work calls while I'm driving," she says.

But she doesn't think cutting back activities is the answer. "My son has to go to batting practice because he needs to make the varsity team because it will help him get into college."

When asked what she does to relax, she just laughs. "There is no time to relax."

Even on business trips, Adams plans ahead to buy school clothes at a nearby mall.

Greg Marrow, an optometric physician in McGaheysville, Va., knows what it's like to run on a treadmill with eyes fixed on the horizon. After he and his wife opened their practice seven years ago, they soon were swamped with patients, and their hours expanded.

Marrow then got the idea to build an office building for the practice and rent out the extra suites as a retirement investment. He wound up doing a lot of the building work himself, sometimes staying until 11 p.m. and sleeping on the floor, he says.

He also started an alpaca farm so his (future) kids could learn to care for the animals, and he would get a tax deduction down the line. Of course, he had to rise at 5 a.m. to take care of the alpacas because his wife was pregnant with their first child.

Three years ago, he turned 40. "All of a sudden, you're 40 years old, and you realize 'The time is now!' Life is just moving way too fast, and I'm not enjoying the present enough. I realized my 'true north' was about my family, but I was making it about everything else in the future."

Marrow and his wife cut their hours and hired another doctor for their practice. He's proud that this year they're taking more vacation "just chill" time with their two preschoolers. "I'm trying to turn it around, I really want to savor the present," he says.

The Marrows may be part of a new wave of well-educated parents who increasingly take their children off fast-track activity schedules to assure a good future, says James Chung, president of Reach Advisors, a marketing research firm.

These parents, most of whom are in their 30s and early 40s, want quality family time now. "They're not as driven as their parents were career-wise, and there's more emphasis on family togetherness. They want their kids to have a good future, but there's less insanity about it," Chung says.

### **Events skew outlook**

Zimbardo is most concerned about how college students view time. Many are preoccupied with unhappy past events and prone to believe that fate controls what happens to them. "This is about 'My life is controlled by outside forces.' They're high in depression and anger," he says.

He says corruption and lies exposed in business and government are souring many young people during what should be a positive, can-do time of life.

Some of their notable elders, acting on warped time perspectives, have not set the best example, Zimbardo argues. He uses the Enron scandal as an example of "instant gratification" hedonism indulged in without regard for consequences.

The best view on time for a flexible life that's well lived is a balanced one, suggests the research by Zimbardo and Boyd. People who

enjoy the most well-being choose to focus on positive experiences in their past or opt for the most favorable interpretation of a difficult past; enjoy plenty of fun in the present without excessive indulgence as they keep a reasonably careful fix on the future; and they don't dwell on past miseries or see what happens to them in the present as "fixed" by fate.

Whatever your attitude toward time, though, it can be changed, Zimbardo emphasizes. Their book offers exercises to "reset your perspective clock."

The Rev. Charles Hughes, 53, is one who feels his clock doesn't need fixing. "I'm a very happy guy. I love life," says Hughes, a campus pastor at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., who also serves a small Baptist church.

Hughes feels positive about the past because he unexpectedly recovered after a van accident 30 years ago left him in a coma for 10 weeks.

He works hard, but he is careful to set aside plenty of time with his three daughters and four grandkids. He plans so he can keep commitments, "but we said no to more things when the girls were growing up."

Sports is a passion, so he treats himself by attending college sporting events. He believes in an afterlife and says: "The Lord has blessed me with time here, so I'm going to use it carefully."

Marrow, the recovering future-fixated eye doctor, says he's relishing his own midlife shift in time perspective: "I'm glad I figured out that life is not a sprint. It's a marathon."

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