



# CONNECTIONS

## LOCAL EFAP NEWS

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### SURVIVING IN A "CRAZYBUSY" WORLD

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**HAPPY HALLOWEEN**

Are you too busy? Are you always running behind? Is your calendar loaded with more than you can possibly accomplish? Without intending for it to happen, many people find that they live in a rush they don't want and didn't create. Being extraordinarily busy - at times, frantic - appears to be the inevitable, uncontrollable consequence of living in today's world.

*If being busier than I'd like to be is the price I have to pay, some of us seem to say, then so be it. After all, modern life is worth it.*

But if we're not careful, we'll get so busy that we'll miss taking the time to think and to feel. We won't have the time required to complete a thought, develop a conversation or reflect upon a complex set of emotions.

#### It's happening already

Someone turned up the burner in the mid-1990's and we're all feeling the heat. The great damage from this is that people are not setting their own temperature or controlling their own lives. This increases stress, makes people sick, causes accidents and errors, turns otherwise polite people rude and reduces the

general level of happiness.

Hope, optimism, confidence and enthusiasm - positive emotional energy - make for happiness and success these days, as they always have done. The difference now is that it is difficult to maintain these attitudes because everyone is in such a hurry.

While living life today can seem like riding a bike no-handed while reading a book and juggling six eggs, it doesn't have to be like that.

Here are some key principles that will help you survive - and even thrive - in our over-busy world.

**\* Do what matters most to you.** Not doing what really matters to you is the most common casualty of an excessively busy life. You must choose. You must prioritize. At the heart of making the most of life today is the ability to treasure and protect your connection to what you care most about: people, places, activities, pets, a spiritual connection, a piece of music, even objects that are dear to you. But you must not have too many connections or none will flourish. Pick the ones that matter the most to you; nourish them and make them top priority.

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\* **Create a positive emotional environment wherever you are.** Keep up positive relationships. Surround yourself with people who bring out the best in you. When you feel safe, secure, welcomed and appreciated, you think better, behave better, work better and are better able to help others. In atmospheres that are negative, people lose flexibility, enthusiasm, patience and humor. They become less able to cooperate, plan, delegate and perform all the functions essential to thriving in a busy environment.

\* **Don't waste time screensucking.** A modern addiction, screensucking is like smoking cigarettes. Once you're hooked, it's tough to quit. I see people on planes or in church twitching and scratching, feeling the pain of not being able to soothe themselves with a screen - TV, computer, PDA etc. First, it's important to recognize the problem. Then make changes in your behavior or your environment that will help you quit: for example, schedule an amount of time to be on the computer and take mandatory screen breaks.

\* **Identify and control the sources of "gemmel-smerch."** This is the force that distracts people from what they want or ought to be doing. For example:

- TV is fine as long as it doesn't consume your attention at the expense of doing other things. Set a time limit for yourself.
- Radio talk shows can also be addictive. Save them for when you're doing dishes, sorting laundry, shaving or in your car.
- Technology (cell phone, e-mail, and the like) need to be controlled. Develop a system that works for you: when you take calls, how you prioritize e-mail and so on.

- Guilt can distract and weigh you down. Address the reasonable part of it. If you've done wrong, make amends. For less logical guilt, accept that you can't do everything, that you have made some difficult but necessary choices and, while this makes you sad and frustrated, it's the best you can do.

\* **Organize—just enough.** Keep the environment you are in well-enough organized so you don't spend unnecessary and frustrating time trying to find things. You don't have to be a neat freak. A danger sign is when you come into your office and feel distraught at what you see: the piles, papers strewn here and there and "Post-its" everywhere all hit you hard and put you in a bad mood. So take organization seriously enough to keep disorganization from becoming a problem.

\* **Don't multitask ineffectively or do what I call frazzing.** Give one task your full attention. You may eventually get so good at it that your conscious mind can attend to other aspects of the task than the menial ones. This is, in fact, the only way a human can multitask effectively—practice one action so thoroughly that it becomes automatic, thus freeing up neurons to attend to matters other than the menial aspects of the task.

\* **Play.** This means engaging imaginatively in what you are doing. It's when you say, "Yes, I've got it now. I'm on a roll." It's when you lose yourself in an activity. But it's not a waste of time, because your bringing to bear the best part of your mind. You will improve whatever it is that you are doing or discover new ways of doing it. You will not get distracted as easily. You will be more efficient and more effective—whether you're carrying on a conversation or making an apple pie.

*By Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.*

*-Adapted from the author's new book "CrazyBusy:*

*Overstretched, Overbooked and About to Snap"*

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