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TAKE TIME

Those elusive seconds, minutes, and hours are man's most precious assets. How should he use them?

By JACK PRIDE

President of Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland 1960-61;
Rotarian, Bath, England.

ON A SUNNY afternoon at the close of Rotary's Convention in New York in 1959 I was standing with an American Rotarian on the corner of 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue. For a moment we had stopped to watch the world go by. What a world it was! The height of Western civilisation: streams of cars, shop windows crammed with luxury goods, well-dressed people full of energy, skyscrapers, entertainment, big business, neon lights, the lot.

I turned to my friend and said, "Yes, you've got everything."

He said a surprising thing in reply. "Sure," he said, "we've got everything except time."

Time.

I cannot see it. You cannot see it. Yet it is the kernel of many of our problems today. How much time have we? What do we do with it? What should we do with it?

Take time to think.

If, as people often say, childhood days are the happiest days of our life, why is it? Surely it is because as children we had time. Time to wonder, time to plan, time to dream. "Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions," someone has said. But once we got embroiled in the busy world, this precious heritage of childhood or youth was stolen from us. Rarely do we see visions any more. "Life is one long rush," we say. "I never seem to have time to do anything."

We find time to think. Otherwise we are only half-powered citizens—and deficient Rotarians. If we take time to think we can hardly fail to see our responsibilities and our obligations. Throughout the world there are now more than half a million Rotarians. As individuals and as members of a world-wide fellowship, the good that we can do is immense. So is the evil that can flourish because of the things we leave undone. Today too few think for too many. In some parts of the world, the whole technique of government is directed toward stopping men from thinking for themselves and making them accept the thoughts of their leaders.

Take time to read.

An eminent literary critic once said that if you read one good book a week, you could read every new book that really mattered,

outside the specialised fields. Yet even if we cannot keep up with all the new books, surely it is up to us to read something more than the predigested passages in the daily papers. They, after all, are ephemeral. "Every paper is printed on its own shroud," said a journalist friend of mine. We should read, as well, something of the golden treasury of good books. Read, mark, learn, and digest something worth while every day.

Take time to give.

It takes time to give yourself, but it is a gift that will last. The pressure of events, the tyranny of the telephone, the blunt bullying of the engagements book, make it all too easy to write out a check instead of signing a warrant on personal service.

The easiest thing to give is advice; the cheapest gift is money. I do not decry the generosity of those who keep the wheels turning for countless good causes. I merely remind you that the greatest gift we have to give is ourselves. Emerson said, "What you are is God's gift to you; what you do with it is your gift to God." In your job, in your Committee work, in your service, or in your home, it is you that counts.

Take time to lead.

The personal example is the greatest factor in leadership. The man next door is still the best judge of what Rotary really is. However busy you are, you have to find time to lead. Many a father has led his son to manhood by the way he behaved at the breakfast table. Leadership, like charity, begins at home. Or in the office or workshop. It spreads, like the morning light, to the life of the city and the nation. It gathers strength in a Rotary Club. That strength can be used in a multitude of places.

The moral leadership of a city or nation is made up of the moral leadership of its individuals. As long as you are citizens of a free country, you are that country. Your ways are its ways, your thoughts are its thoughts. Your failures are its failures.

Finally, take time to live.

Living life as we were meant to is not easy. Some say it gets more difficult with every generation. Happiness is a by-product of doing well something you really believe is worth doing. And that means finding time for it. The late Lord Baden-Powell said he had been fortunate in having three lives. One in the Army, one in the Boy Scouts movement (which he founded), and one through the habit of getting up at 4 in the morning.

It rests with each one of us to find some new time.