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Mindful About Life

Focus, Flourish and Fly
using the science of positive psychology

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What is your time perspective?

I want to talk about our relationship with time. I am not talking about if time flies or if time moves as slow as molasses. And we have all had a weird experience with time for the last while with many of our routines and times completely upside down. Those are all important points, but it is not what I want to talk about.

I want to talk about a concept called “time perspective”. But how do you perceive time? Are you happy with how you relate to time? Does your perspective of time serve you well?

Dr. Philip Zimbardo and Dr. John Boyd created the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory, since scientists need a way to measure what they are studying before they can study it. And this inventory has 5 or 6 (depending how you count) different measures. These time perspective measures can actually predict some of your behaviors. We all have a little of each time perspective and all of the perspectives have both healthy and less healthy aspects. Being mindful of your time perspective can help

you manage your focus in life and help you to flourish faster.

Different people have different memories of the past. Some people focus mostly on the positive things that happened in the past – The Good Old Days. They are very nostalgic and have lots of good memories. On the flip side, we all know people who look at the past and remember every painful experience and slight that ever happened. Or keep reminding themselves of all of their regrets. You need both of these to function well, but one of these serves you better than the other. For example, if you never remember the things that went wrong in the past, you will never learn from your mistakes. On the other hand, if you only remember mistakes and no victories, you may never want to take any chances because nothing ever goes right. But there are other consequences. People who have more of a past-negative perspective are more prone to aggression and depression while those with a past-positive perspective are generally friendlier and have better self-esteem. How do you usually look at your past?

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Let's move on to the present! Dr. Zimbardo defines two present time perspectives, present-hedonistic and present-fatalistic. The present-hedonist lives for today and has a devil-may-care attitude. They may take a lot of risks and may often lose track of time when they are in the middle of something they enjoy. The present-fatalist is hopeless and helpless. They feel no control over their lives so why bother even trying! Just let the chips fall where they may because our lives are controlled by fate anyway.

Again, many of us can might think about how we might enjoy life a little more and just let ourselves be swept away by the moment. And some of us may want to consider being a little more cautious of what we are doing because it might lead to a negative outcome. The dark side of these is that the present-fatalist tends to be more anxious and the present-hedonist is more of a risk taker and may be more prone to addiction problems. Again, both of these perspectives have both a positive and a negative. Being mindful of these can help you keep them in balance.

Let's look to the future. People with a future-oriented perspective plan for the future. They may have a list of goals and do a good job at ticking things off the list. They probably save money for their retirement and take care of their health. While this may sound great, future-oriented people may be more prone to being workaholics and may have a hard time enjoying themselves right now. An extreme,

perhaps, of the future perspective is the transcendental -future perspective. People with orientation don't just look to the future but look to a time after death. These people believe that the consequences of today's actions will come in the world to come.

All of these perspectives have upsides and downsides and, as with most things, are best when kept in balance.

One very tangible outcome of these time perspectives was seen in research with 82 homeless people who came to a city shelter and were assessed when they arrived. Those with more of a future orientation spent less time in the shelter, were more likely to learn while they were there and reported gaining positive benefits from their predicament. Those who were more present-oriented spent more time watching TV and not gaining new skills.

Some interesting research has been done about time perspective and where you live. If you live in Northern Europe where you had to make sure to plant, grow and harvest in the summer so that you could eat in the winter, you may have more of a future orientation that includes planning and goals. On the other hand, if you live near the equator where food grows all year long and life is pretty laid back, you are more likely to be more present oriented.

Dr. Oskana Senyk did research in the Ukraine and found that people who lived in

rural areas had more of a past perspective and city dwellers had more of a future perspective. People who grew up and still live in villages had a positive past perspective while those who grew up in villages and moved to cities were less likely to see the past in a positive light. And Drs. Nicolas Fieulaine and Thémis Apostolidis wrote an essay about the correlation between time perspective and social class with poorer people being more present oriented and higher classes being more future oriented.

If you find this intriguing I urge you to take the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory [here](#) and learn what Dr. Zimbardo thinks is optimal [here](#). If you want to change your time perspective, a good life coach can help with that. And if you are happy with where you are right now, you just might be a present-hedonist!