



Shaya Kass, PhD

# Mindful About Life

Focus, Flourish and Fly  
using the science of positive psychology

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## My time, your time, or our time?

Do you feel you have enough time? We all know that every single person on the planet gets the same 24 hours each day, the same 168 hours each week. Why does it seem that some people have more time than others?

There is a notion in positive psychology of “time affluence”. To measure this, Dr. Yu Niiya of Hosei University in Japan asked people if they felt that time was “zero-sum” or “nonzero-sum”.

Think about that for a moment. When you spend time with someone, do you feel they are taking away your time? Or do you feel enriched having spent time with them? Obviously, this is different with the different people you spend time with. When the neighborhood nag corners me for 10 minutes to complain about dogs urinating on the grass I feel differently than when a student keeps me 10 minutes after class asking how to properly word a paragraph.

But in general, if you are spending time with others, do you feel you’re also spending time on yourself? In general, do you feel that others take away your time? Do you feel you take away time from others? These questions get at the heart of time affluence. Some people feel they have plenty of time and are time affluent, some feel that they

never have enough time and experience time scarcity.

The point is not how you feel about time but rather how you feel about yourself! Dr. Niiya also asked her subjects if they are compassionate, if they feel their basic needs are met and if they have a positive self-image. Finally, Dr. Niiya asked how stressed people feel and about their well-being.

She found, not surprisingly, that people who have more compassionate goals have more time for others and feel time affluent. People who are worried about their self-image tend to be competitive and, in general, feel resource scarcity, and, no surprise, they feel time scarcity as well.

In a separate study, Dr. Cassie Mogilner Holmes asked college students to either help out a high-schooler for 15 minutes or let them leave the study 15 minutes early. You would think that those who got to leave 15 minutes early would have felt more time affluent. And you would have thought wrong. Helping others makes you time affluent.

So how do you feel about your time? Do you feel like you never have enough and cannot spend time on others? Or do you



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feel okay about your time and always have time to help a friend? And have you considered how your thinking about time affects your work and your stress levels?