

Optimus Consulting

Special Report

Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?



Special Report

Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Background	4
The Big Frustrations	4
The Main Satisfactions	6
‘So What’ Action Recommendations	8
About The Author	10

Special Report

Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?

Executive Summary

This special report explores the reasons why so many people are ticked off about time. Based on the results of a survey that asked respondents to comment on their frustrations and satisfactions with time, the report concludes with suggestions about how to deal with the issues that surfaced in the study.

What frustrates people most when it comes to their experience of time? The runaway winner topping the list of frustrations is unrealistic work expectations – the pressure from self and others to do more than is humanly possible.

The top ten list of frustrations suggest people want to tackle meaningful activities and be present during the experience. However, we attempt to do too much, move too fast, remain confused about priorities, and are challenged to coordinate our actions with others.

And what do people place at the top of their lists of most satisfying experiences with time? Think lack of routine. Think distance. Think far from everyday responsibilities. Think vacation and travel, because that's the top place winner in the time sweepstakes.

Yes, people do value the accomplishment of tasks in a productive, uninterrupted way. But even more importantly, we value open, unstructured stretches of time and the opportunities they offer to be present to ourselves, to attend to the important people in our lives, and to appreciate the world around us.

This report outlines in greater detail how the survey was conducted. The top ten ranked frustrations and satisfactions are illustrated with comments from survey respondents. The closing section offers recommendations for creating more satisfying experiences with time.

Background

These findings are the result of a survey conducted by Optimus Consulting between April, 1999 and August, 2002. This is an update on initial results first reported in early 2001.

Respondents were asked to describe in writing one of their most satisfying experiences with time and one of their most frustrating experiences with time. Responses were collected during seminars delivered by the author, and through an on-line survey on the author's website.

117 respondents participated in the survey. Three quarters of the respondents were women and one quarter were men.

More than half of the respondents were in their forties. Approximately 30% were in their thirties, 10% in their fifties, and 5% in their twenties.

Occupationally, 24% worked in management roles, 22% performed clerical and administrative functions, 19% were consultants, 17% provided personal services, 11% worked in education, and 8% were engaged in a variety of other occupations.

The Big Frustrations

The top ten frustrations were ranked in this order with those most frequently mentioned at the top of the list:

1. Unrealistic work expectations
2. Waiting
3. Rushing during transitions
4. Lack of accomplishment
5. Conflicting priorities
6. Time disappearing
7. Scheduling others
8. Guilt about choices
9. Meetings
10. Going through the motions

Unrealistic work expectations are described in a number of ways: always feeling under pressure to perform even when resources aren't available, no time to do things properly, lack of influence or control over deadlines, poor estimates of time required for tasks, sacrificing sleep to get the job done, projects piled on top of routine work, weekly 'to do' lists that never end.

"My ongoing frustration with time is a pathological inability to gauge how much time I need to do things. As a result, I am almost always a bit behind, and always feel like there is too much to do!"

Special Report - Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?

With very high expectations and so much emphasis on accomplishment, having to wait for information or appointments and traffic delays are a great source of frustration for individuals.

“I’m frustrated by people who deliberately make other people wait. People who feel their time supercedes that of others. I am an extremely patient person. I do not, however, appreciate when someone takes advantage of my time.”

Despite experiences to the contrary, respondents seem to feel that life should run on time and that shifts from one role or situation to another should go smoothly. Making those transitions between home and work, travelling to appointments, and shepherding others to their activities deteriorates into a tense and frustrating race against the clock.

“I always feel like I am rushing and I feel the stress of this in my body in the form of tightness around the shoulders, between shoulder blades and in the lower back. I find it difficult to step back and take a deep breath ..I cannot afford the time to do this!”

A perceived lack of accomplishment also rates highly as a point of frustration. Interruptions, technical delays, unexpected problems all work against the desire to get things done.

“My organizational skills are challenged. I am most frustrated by the ‘waste of time’ looking for that file, searching for that receipt, finishing that report at the last minute.”

Conflicting priorities plague many respondents. Juggling responsibilities between roles and within roles creates frustrations and leaves people feeling shortchanged on personal time.

“I am frustrated by having to make the choices between what I want to do and what I should do. Every area suffers because no one area of life ever receives enough of my time or my energy to allow me to feel in control.”

Time flies! This time warp experience of having time seemingly evaporates into thin air leaves people wondering what happened and regretting they may have missed important experiences along the way.

“We cannot stop it. We should enjoy the present, but at times it feels like there is not enough time to do that.”

Respondents were not only concerned with managing their own time. Many were frustrated in their attempts to coordinate and organize the activities of others in their families and at work.

“Just before my son’s wedding, my husband was still in the shower when everyone else was leaving the house. I got to the wedding harassed and frazzled.”

Indecision sometimes causes problems, but feeling guilty about the choices and decisions that have been made is frustrating for some.

Special Report - Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?

“I’m frustrated by not having or making the time to do things or activities that help create balance in my life. I feel guilty when not busy.”

The time drain caused by too frequent and sorely unproductive meetings is a great source of frustration.

“The organization I work for has an insatiable appetite to consume management time. Since the organization doesn’t appear able or interested in monitoring itself, I am choosing to do it for the organization. I refuse to engage in all activities and meetings. I pick and choose those that must be done or that make sense strategically.”

With time at a premium, tasks that fall in the ‘make work’ or ‘going through the motions’ category seem particularly wasteful.

“I’m frustrated by just getting the work done to get to the other side.”

The Main Satisfaction

As certainly as frustrations led to frowns, the remembrance of satisfactions clearly led to smiles. The joy and pleasure of satisfying experiences with time were evident in the replies.

The top ten satisfactions were ranked in this order with those most frequently mentioned at the top of the list:

1. Vacation & travel
2. Completing tasks
3. Family time
4. Unstructured/unplanned time
5. Perspective
6. Presence/engagement
7. Being with nature
8. Productive/in the flow
9. Solitude
10. Bonus moments

Although a few respondents describe travelling to distant exotic locations, the most highly valued aspect of vacation seems to be the chance to relax, without routine – to the point of losing track of time completely.

“It was actually so relaxing it felt strange – like you shouldn’t be doing this.”

Completing tasks holds the number two spot on the list of satisfactions. Finishing a task carried its own rewards, particularly if it is completed ahead of time.

“A very satisfying moment in time was the high I received from completing a significant project that had a very tight timeline, on time.”

Though many of the top rated satisfactions include activities with other family members, family time was specifically mentioned by a number of respondents. From simply being

Special Report - Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?

in each others' presence to sharing activities or bedtime rituals, all of these activities bring great satisfaction to the moment.

“I took an extra day off work and created a long weekend during a very hectic time at work. The time I spent with my family helped me focus on what was important. When I did get back to the office, I didn't seem so busy after all. It was just stuff to do!”

This lack of structure, even when not on vacation, rates high on the list of satisfactions. People love having an hour, an afternoon, or a day to respond as the spirit moves them – “not feeling pressured to be anywhere”. As one respondent noted “...to sleep in, take a walk, window shop, read, take a nap, eat ...whenever’. This freedom is highly valued and greatly satisfying.

“Occasionally, the world slows down. There is nothing that needs to be done, no projects that are facing deadlines, no events to prepare for, no family members who need to be fed, clothed or advised. When this happens, each moment can be felt, heard, tasted and then tucked away in memory. When life becomes hectic, the memory of those moments can be pulled out as a reminder of what life can be.”

Maintaining a big picture perspective about the place of time also appears on the list of satisfactions. Sometimes perspective is gained through exposure to another culture's more flexible view of time. Sometimes it takes the form of granting oneself the permission to take the time needed to complete the task at hand or recognize what really matters.

“I have learned that time rarely matters. It is like soft-sided luggage that accommodates as little or as much as I choose to pack. What happens is what happens. There is rarely a time I feel that there isn't enough time for what I want to do.”

Though the disappearance of time showed up on the list of frustrations, it is also a sign of being wholly present - full, completely and satisfyingly engaged in the moment.

“When you are doing something you like, you really get into it. At the end, you find the time has stretched and seems endless – like summer when you were a kid! The feeling is total satisfaction.”

Hiking trails in the rain, biking through old growth forest, relaxing by a lake, pausing to listen to the creaking and cracking of the winter ice - responding to the sights, sounds, and smells of nature enrich the experience of the moment and make it memorable.

“While the sun set at the lake on the beach, for a moment time stood still and nothing else mattered.”

The experience of being in the flow – of productively using time to tackle an activity in a focused, uninterrupted way – is highly valued.

“For me to be allowed the luxury of taking a project from beginning to end is my dream come true.”

Special Report - Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?

Solitude - time alone - is valued for the opportunity to reconnect with self and the world in ways that seem impossible when moving full speed ahead.

“A long roadtrip by myself is an ultimate experience in quality personal time. I find the open road to be my escape from a busy world. It is my time to reflect, plan, and grow.”

With time at a premium, found moments are appreciated as a bonus – an especially rewarding treat.

“Occasionally I wake up early, without nudging from my alarm clock or my husband. I find myself with the time to sit and have a cup of tea in my rocking chair and read the paper before I start the day. I love that.”

These satisfactions were also noted by a smaller number of individuals: orderliness, experiences structured by others, multi-tasking, integrating life and learning, and exercise.

‘So What’ Action Recommendations

So what can be gleaned from the results of the survey? What do these experiences suggest for the way we might approach the time of our life? How might we shift the balance of our experience of time to reduce frustrations and create more satisfactions?

Here are eighteen possibilities:

1. Speak up about workplace expectations. Don’t bite the bullet and suffer in silence.
2. Pay attention to workload. Learn from past experiences. Improve time estimates on projects. Negotiate more reasonable limits, deadlines and resources.
3. Expect delays and plan to use the time for other purposes – including relaxation.
4. Build in time cushions for transitions and travel. Don’t time everything down to the last split second and expect to be calm and present to the moment.
5. Take your vacation time and don’t structure holidays to the nth degree.
6. Find ways to put yourself in the presence of nature more often.
7. Slow things down. Calm things down. Pause between tasks and at other times of transition.
8. Leave time and space during your weeks and days to be available to the possibilities of the moment.

Special Report - Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?

© 2002 Patricia Katz, Optimus Consulting – www.patkatz.com – (877) 728-5289

9. Recognize the value in the unexpected serendipitous surprise occurrences, not just in the planned events of life.
10. Approach life's activities in a more leisurely frame of mind. Replace thoughts like 'I'm late' with 'I've time enough'.
11. Dispense with the guilt. Learn to enjoy the choices you make and appreciate 'free' time for the pleasure it brings to you and others.
12. Determine when time matters and when it doesn't. Relationships and events do not often unfold 'by the clock' or according to some pre-ordained schedule.
13. Hold chunks of time and space in reserve – free evenings or weekends or lunch hours. Don't jam every moment of your day with 'something to do'.
14. Celebrate accomplishments for the satisfaction they bring. Recognize both progress on tasks and completion.
15. Pay closer attention to the big picture perspective. Learn what you value and enjoy. Carve out time for more of it.
16. Identify useless 'make work' tasks and projects. Eliminate them.
17. Be present for more of life's experiences. Keep your mind in the moment.
18. Open the discussion about time frustrations and satisfactions with colleagues, friends and family. Act on shared concerns.

Special Report - Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?

About The Author



Patricia Katz MCE CHRP
helps busy people maximize their time and minimize their stress.

Based in Western Canada, this speaker and author of four books
specializes in productivity, perspective, and peace of mind.

To bring Patricia's expertise to your organization,
call toll free (877-728-5289) or connect through the web (www.patkatz.com).

Subscribe to the **free** weekly e-zine, 'PAUSE – The Voice of Sanity in a Speed Crazed
World' at: <http://www.patkatz.com/resources/newsletter.shtml>.

Request your **free** copy of Patricia's tip sheet, "Ten Tips For Making The Most Of Your
Time & Your Life" by fax (306-242-0795) or email (info@patkatz.com).

Special Report - Why Are We So Ticked Off About Time?

© 2002 Patricia Katz, Optimus Consulting – www.patkatz.com – (877) 728-5289