

The Time of Your Lives



Kathy Simons (2018 WTS-LA Chapter President), Photo by John Livzey, 2018

At a graduation ceremony recently, the speaker said a great many profound and moving things, perfect advice to send young women and men out into the world. But one thing stood out. She said, “Your families are extremely proud of you. You can't imagine the sense of relief they are experiencing. This would be a most opportune time to ask for money.” Brought down the house, but the students took note. Smart kids.

Thank you. People have been most resolute and kind in letting me know their feelings about these monthly missives. While not everyone necessarily agrees with what I have to say—which I take as a good sign—several people have gone out of their way to let me know that the WTS-LA monthly president's letter has moved them in some way. Well, that's all I can ask. This isn't always about agreement. It is always about illumination. So, I just want to thank them specifically for taking the time and energy to contact me and let me know that my words have landed. And that leads me right back to the graduation speaker and asking for money.

No, I'm not asking you for money. But I do want to talk about the speaker's awareness of timing, i.e., knowing that the best time to hit your parents up for cash is right when you're celebrating your hard work and achievement at graduation. Timing is everything. But it is often overlooked in everyday life. Think about it.

You're at your desk. The phone rings. God bless caller ID. It's that client or superior or vendor or relative (that always needs money) that you *really* don't want to talk to, not right now. You've got too much on your plate and the last thing you need is...more. So, you don't answer. Not answering, however, is as much a choice as picking up the phone and dealing with whatever issue awaits. You are affecting your life and someone else's by choosing to not pick up. Now, in some situations, many situations, this is no big deal. They'll call back. You'll call them later. The world continues to turn. But in other situations, it can mean the difference between life and death, both figuratively and literally, and professionally and personally. Yes, that sounds extreme. It is, and with good reason.

Let's say the phone did ring and it was an important client. You didn't want to talk to him, so you let it go to voice mail. Happens every day. Now what? Do you call them back later? How much later? Minutes? Hours? Days? Weeks? Never? You have started a scenario, a series of actions that can dictate perceptions about how much you value that client. If you call them back in minutes, that says one thing. Forget to call them back at all, and that says something quite different. What if that client wasn't calling about work, but wanted to unload free tickets to *Hamilton* they can't use? Addressing things in a timely manner can mean the difference between gaining a great opportunity or missing the boat entirely. Let me give you another example.

A friend told me a story. It was late at night. He was about to turn in after studying hard for the GREs that he was taking early the next morning. The phone rang. It was a woman he hadn't heard from in a long time, but one he had pined for. Answer it or not? He did. They talked for two hours. He lost valuable sleep before taking an important exam. But in those two hours, he gained much more than the sleep he lost. They've been married for 29 years. So, what's my point? Just always answer the phone?

No. Sometimes you just don't need to talk to your cousin Chuck and find out what particular financial straits he's foundered into today. But know this. Answering the phone or not answering the phone, speaking up or not speaking up, spending time with your child or spouse instead of staying late at work—these choices all have very real consequences for good or bad. And it's all about timing. While you can never know what's to come in terms of timing, know that the choices you make affects the timing of your life and others in your sphere. You may never know how far your influence goes, too. So, as best you can, try to imagine the ramifications of your actions, particularly when it comes to being timely. Know that those choices will dictate perceptions and actions. Many actions and inactions center on fear. We all have fears. But sometimes it's better to just push through those fears, deal with the reality of the call (or whatever) and move on. Just think about it.

In Thomas Mann's opus, *The Magic Mountain*, he said, "Time has no divisions to mark its passage, there is never a thunderstorm or blare of trumpets to announce the beginning of a new month or year. Even when a new century begins it is only we mortals who ring bells and fire off pistols." We mortals must not only keep time, we mark it, as Mann says. So, let us move forward together with that awareness, the understanding that we humans create timeliness, and therefore are responsible for its meaning and its ramifications in our lives and the lives of others.