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Reconnecting With What Really Matters

Like many of us this morning, I will begin my day thinking about the many items that need to be done. I will have my *to-do* list. There will be phone calls to make, meetings to attend, errands to run, and numerous e-mails awaiting my attention. This flurry of activity seems necessary to "get something done" and feel productive.

As I repeat this daily routine, I find the days clicking by unnoticed, the weekends coming and going quickly. Life seems to be moving at such an increasing speed. (How can a school year be over already?)

I notice there is always something I could be *doing*.

Our society's advancements contribute to this philosophy of "busyness." E-mail and cell phones make us accessible at all times, and people tend to expect quick response. After all, our very survival is based on being productive, right? We must go to work each day and do as Jackson Browne once sang, "struggle for the legal tender." Indeed, we must work, we must produce, we must check off our TO DO's.

But, what happens when a society of people get so caught up in their activity, they lose touch with what really matters to them?

A Different Lens

Once while we were discussing his family life, an executive proudly shared that he hadn't missed even one of his daughter's birthdays. In fact, he had personally videotaped the entire celebration, year after year. But further into the conversation, the man tearfully realized that he had been so busy recording the parties, he wasn't actually there *with* his daughter. What's more, it became clear to him that for the first several birthdays of her life, she experienced her father as a giant camera lens, and little else. While the details change, this is a common story. We show up physically for the important stuff, but get lost in our own agenda. We hear what is being said, without really listening to the message. We are losing the ability to "BE PRESENT." We coast through the day, checking e-mails, voicemails, reading the newspaper, on autopilot. When we are lucky, our family sometimes gives us the chance to be jolted from this automatic behavior. They help us to realize that we have become way too busy to "listen" to what's important.

So maybe we need a "TO BE LIST".

Maybe this new list might include:

- Be patient.
- Be available to my spouse.
- Be fully attentive to my children when I am with them. (Leave cell phone in car.)
- Be easier to get along with at work.
- Be friendly to strangers.
- Be happy. (Smile more)

Can we just slow down a bit and BE WITH one another? What's the rush? Is it not moving fast enough already that we need to hurry it up even more?

It seems unfeasible that we should abandon our 'matters of importance' for what appears like an intangible payoff. We know if we work and keep busy, we will accomplish, be recognized, and achieve a sense of control. But are we really creating a meaningful quality of life if we are constantly reacting to the endless - and it is endless, by the way - list of things that pop up and demand our attention?

The Broader Picture

If we put down the to-do lists (and at first it isn't easy) we begin to see that life really does move forward despite the seriousness we assign to our tasks. In fact, after a time of being committed to 'being,' a sense of curiosity, awareness and connection emerges quite naturally. We don't find ourselves 'having' to attend an event at our kids' school, or 'trying' to be a better husband/wife, or even 'working harder.' We just start being happy, fulfilled and capable of giving a lot more, without effort.

Would Charlotte be a stronger community if we slowed the speed just a bit? Could we take some time to really get to know people at work? Or in our own neighborhoods? Could we go for more walks and forgo a few TV shows or video games? Could we go for more bike rides and less car rides? Can we spend more time outside?

Many communities have spent time and money studying how to be a better city. Often times the solutions sound something like, "Build social capital;" "Build more trust..." What if the answer to accomplishing these things was not to create more tasks, boards and committees, but to truly be present in the ones we choose? What if by being and listening, we see that the answers to a healthy, vibrant community are right here waiting for us?

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