

Time Urgency and Anxiety: The Seventh Step for the Final Week

By *Robert L. Leahy, Ph.D.*

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Our anxious brains were evolved to respond to a threat that was immediate. The tiger in the bush wasn't going to wait around for your ancestor to carry out probabilistic calculations about false alarms. Danger was imminent and your response-to-escape-needed to be instantaneous. Reflection was the hallmark of the "soon to be eaten".

Time Urgency and Everyday Anxiety

So, how does this time urgency translate into your everyday anxieties?

You are stuck in traffic and you say to yourself, "I can't stand this. It's driving me crazy!" So you blow your horn, bang the dashboard, scream expletives. And you still can't move your car. But you feel a sense of urgency to get out of here. You feel trapped.



You start breathing rapidly. Your heart is racing. You are sweating. You are thinking that you will have a panic attack if you don't get the hell out of here immediately. But then you look around at your leather interior car with its Bose sound system and its luxurious air conditioned interior and you wonder, "What am I worried about?" The rational part of your brain knows that it's safe. But your amygdala is screaming, "Get out of here!"

Your panic seems to come on more strongly. This is the sense of "suffocation" that you have feared as you gasp for breath. Your brain keeps pounding away with the alarm, "You

have to get out!" You think, "If only I could get out of the car and run like a madman, then I'd feel better." But you know that you would then think you are crazy.



You wake up in the middle of the night and you think, in your dreamy, somewhat intoxicated state, "Will I ever find the love of my life?" You look next to you-and that person is not the love of your life. And now you panic, "When will I find my true love?" You lie in bed, ruminating, twitching and turning, impatient. You've got to know right now. But you don't.

You notice a spot on your skin and it's Friday night and you think, "This could be cancer". But you also know that you can't see your doctor until next week. You have to know right now. So you Google skin cancer and drive yourself insane with worries until your next appointment.

Your brain tells you that you need to know right now. You can't stand waiting. You can't accept uncertainty. Like everyone who is anxious, you are plagued by time urgency.

Seven Steps to Putting Time on Your Side

Let's think this through for a few minutes. Take your time.

1. What is the disadvantage to you of time urgency? Doesn't it make you continually anxious and worried? Doesn't it deprive you of the ability to enjoy the present moment? Aren't you irritable and sometimes difficult to be around? Wouldn't you be better off with a cooler head and more patience?
2. What if you don't know right now? Why is that so bad? Are you thinking that if you don't know right now, then you will never know? Or, that things will turn out badly? Not knowing right now is exactly that-you might know later. In fact, you will know later. Just wait.
3. Is your body and mind keyed up to take action? Your adrenaline is shooting through you as you are prepared for immediate action. Turn down the adrenaline. Practice relaxing, let go of your breath. Surrender. Your brain may be telling you, "Don't surrender".



Let it go. You will find that nothing happens. No emergency.

4. How many times have you been wrong about needing to know right now? False alarms and emergencies constantly deprive you of your life. When you didn't know right now, was it always a bad outcome? Aren't you still here?

5. Set aside your worry until five hours later. Revisit the issue of urgency at that time. Does it now seem irrelevant? Why?

6. Get into a time machine. Go five years into the future. Eventually you will have the answer to your question. So why not simply enjoy the time in between?

7. What can you still do even if you don't know right now? Plan all of the positive and meaningful activities that you can do even if you don't have your answer right now. Fill your life with action and appreciation and you will crowd out the alarms.

Not knowing right now doesn't have to mean not living right now.

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