A year can be measured in minutes—525,600 of them. Each of us is given the same amount of minutes in a day. Unfortunately, we often misuse or squander them. Minutes are irreplaceable, yet most of us are careless in how we allocate our time. Minutes can never be called back or used again. They are gone forever.

We over-commit to doing something without stopping to think about how much time it will take. Or, we may spend time on something that really is not that important. Wise use of time does not mean we always have to be busy doing things, going somewhere, or accomplishing a list of tasks. We somehow think it’s wrong or irresponsible to not be busy, that we are wasting time, and many of us will not permit ourselves to just take a few minutes to enjoy the moments of the day. We fall into the trap of thinking there is always tomorrow to accomplish our plans and dreams.

There is no denying our days are busy, frantic, frustrating and stressful. The routine things we do can be overwhelming. There is an enormous amount of pressure to perform and produce efficiently in our work environments. Economic uncertainty further adds to stress, worry, and exhaustion. We work long hours, overeat, get little exercise, and struggle for a good night’s sleep.

Are we really wasting time if we allow ourselves the freedom to do whatever brings us pleasure for 15 or 20 minutes of each day?

Finding Balance

One of the greatest values of minutes is that every single one brings opportunity. An opportunity to pause, breathe, and think about what is working in our lives, what can be improved, and how to better use our minutes to create happiness and balance in our lives. Research tells us that having ‘free-time’ is good for our well-being and happiness.2,3

The key then is to find the balance between deadlines and goals, the rush of living, and taking time to slow down. To let our bodies and minds rest and rejuvenate. Self-care is important and we should pamper ourselves with rest and rejuvenating rituals and leisure activities.

Research supports our constantly renewing, exercising, and developing all the dimensions of our well-being (physical, mental, social, and spiritual), to help find equilibrium in our lives. Well-being depends on knowing that we are healthy in all aspects of ourselves.4

The physical dimension covers such things as exercise, eating habits, and how we handle pressure and stress. The social/emotional element deals with how we relate to people in our environment. The mental dimension includes intellectual vigor such as reading books, visualizing, and planning. The spiritual dimension is about our core, our set of values and how we live up to our faith and our beliefs.

Juggling all aspects of life has always been a balancing act and perfect equilibrium is clearly not attainable. Certainly, our time can never be perfectly balanced because the challenges and ambiguities of life will always interfere. Then we find ourselves caught up in doing things that seem most urgent, regardless of whether they are important or not. Or, because we perceive it is something someone thinks we should do.

Balance then is not so much an issue of time, but of choices in how to use our time, energy, and passion. It is integrating the dimensions of life into a workable pattern, with strong, flexible connections between the areas. It is finding ways to include several minutes for ourselves in doing things that do not feel like a burden.

In modern society we are surrounded by noise; traffic noise, endless emails and phone calls, the chatter of people and technology. It seems that there is never a quiet time to relax and recharge. Taking 15 or 20 minutes a couple of times a day to sit quietly can be very helpful. Even the small moments, enjoying a cup of tea, calling a friend, reading a favorite book, or jotting a few thoughts in a journal, should be appreciated and enjoyed.

Mindfulness derails all the clutter and chaos in our minds. Our awareness naturally turns inward, and our concentration deepens as our attention is taken off of stressful thoughts and feelings. We need a few minutes to be present in our days, to build the habit of using our minutes wisely, whether in meditating, exercising, sitting in traffic, working, or playing.

Like mindfulness, happiness can be developed into a habit. Happiness is an integral part of well-being. Life circumstances account for only 10 percent of happiness. Half depends on our genetics. About 40 percent of our happiness is influenced by what we do deliberately to make ourselves happy.2,3

We can choose to find happiness in small, everyday things. We can choose to interpret what happens in a positive way or in a negative way. Psychological research shows that positive emotions are associated with greater creativity, increased problem-solving ability, and greater overall success in life. Evidence also tells us that for every sin-
gle heart-wrenching negative emotion that drags us down, we need at least three heart-lifting positive emotions to buoy us up. Each of us needs to find the minutes to generate our sources of positivity each day. 3

We tend to forget that happiness does not come as a result of getting something we do not have, but rather in recognizing and appreciating what we do have. It does not take a whole lot of time to find something for which we can be grateful. Be grateful for the things we often overlook, the things we take for granted: the smile of a child, a hug from a friend, food on the table, a great job, breathtaking sunsets, good health, rain, or just a few moments of solitude. Appreciating the many small things in our day will lead to greater and greater levels of gratitude and happiness.3

Happiness is a gift. Happiness comes from within and by our own choice. Happiness is often a flash, a moment, in the challenges of the day. Anyone who spends a few minutes watching the magic of the sun sinking below the horizon knows the feeling. Learn to delight in those little moments.

Researchers believe volunteering boosts happiness and well-being because it increases empathy, which makes us appreciate all the good stuff in our own lives. Longitudinal studies show that volunteering boosts positive mental and physical health, including living a longer life.6

Remember to laugh. Laugh out loud. Laughing releases dopamine, a natural opiate. There is strong evidence that laughter actually improves our health and can help prevent disease. Laughter creates a good mood for ourselves and others. Really good moods bring optimism, more laughter, creativity and sheer joy. Good moods help us bear all the daily irritations of life with humor and grace.

Perhaps instead of huge easy-to-break New Year’s resolutions, we could think about small steps toward a more well-rounded us. To take some time to understand what we truly want and how we might gain the best result and then continually strive to achieve what we desire.

Finally, be grateful. Gratitude, meaningful relationships, and living in the present moment are said to contribute to happiness and life satisfaction.

A life worth living is one in motion. We live every day with our fears, anger, joy, laughter, and distrust. And, we are busy: raising children, working, just dealing with the routine of life. However, busy is only a perception of how we occupy our time. We can choose to see it negatively, as something that depletes us, or we can use it wisely in an energized, productive, and grateful way to be living a life full of experience and opportunities. We can seize each moment of each day to really see and savor the important things in our lives.

Balance and quality of life is the enjoyment of the millions of minutes in between all our accomplishments. Know the true value of time, snatch, seize, and enjoy every minute of it.

References