



Council for
Public Interest
in Anesthesia

Changing Time

Sandra Tunajek, CRNA, DNP
CPIA Consultant

Equinoxes are times of balance and change. Days and nights approach the same length, and the energy of the Earth shifts. Spring is a season of beginnings and renewal. The fall harvest reminds us that it is a time for putting away, preserving, and getting ready for the

challenges of winter.

With the harvest comes the end of long, slower days of the summer. Activities tend to move toward the rhythmic, more structured routine that occurs each year. Regular schedules for school and work are followed; darkness occurs sooner; bedtimes are more closely adhered to; and “turning back the time” brings a sense of urgency, a need for rushing to get things accomplished.

Nurse anesthetists and students are susceptible to the stressors related to the rush of day-to-day routines. The pace and competitiveness of anesthesia practice has rapidly accelerated. Technological innovation has heightened demands for instant accessibility, and anesthetists remain perpetually on call. Workforce shortages, reimbursement issues, and productivity-related concerns have pushed environmental stressors to unprecedented levels. Workplace incivility and violence is escalating, forcing individuals and institutions to change practices, policies, and organizational cultures. The result is an overwhelming clash between personal and professional commitments.

Change, Growth, and Stress

Change involves many factors and affects us in many forms. Juggling priorities would be much easier if things didn't change. On a positive note, change may prompt us to reflect on what have we accomplished, to realign our expectations, or to resolve to make different choices and actions. On the other hand, change affects our moods and attitudes and creates stress.¹ For many, change is hard—so hard, in fact, that most of us avoid it at all costs. But by avoiding change, we create even bigger problems, greater stress, such as lost opportunities, conflict, poor job performance, broken relationships, or other consequences.

Stress is a complex, dynamic process of interaction between a person and his or her life and how we react physically, mentally, and emotionally to various conditions. Change means stepping into the unknown and losing our comfortable routines, often it means giving up control.

Change is a multi-step process with the major hurdle being moving from thinking to actually doing. Finding the time required to initiate and sustain a major change is difficult. Research has shown that those



who take care of themselves and manage their lifestyles are healthier, more productive, have fewer absences, and make fewer demands on the medical services. We know the “secret” is not in medical care, but in consistent self-care in which you adopt habits and behaviors that promote better health and an improved quality of life. Yet, we often feel comfortable with the status quo, saying we are “too busy” as a reason to avoid change, particularly in our work and personal lives.

Balance and Values

Multiple studies document the direct and indirect benefits of a healthy workplace environment for both individuals and organizations.² We know today's complex environment integrates multiple variables that are constantly shifting and changing, particularly in healthcare economics. The healthcare system as a unit is undergoing extensive change and most variables are outside the nurse anesthetist's control.

When you're not in control, how can you create the positive energy needed to undertake change? Although you may not influence or control external factors for change, you can take responsibility and actions for your own self-care. The key is to make a choice to face stress and consciously take time to implement strategies for minimizing its negative impact on your life and practice. You can find a balance between the pressure that propels change and the workaholic characteristics that have presumably contributed to your successes.

Like the equinoxes, the balance is frequently blurred and often synergistic—an external pressure can be converted into an internal desire for a balance between work and personal life. Feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope with high levels of stress may signal the need for significant changes.

Any social environment includes habits and customs related to how people plan and organize their activities and integrate their personal and professional lives. The concept of time and time-related behaviors has been studied in numerous disciplines and suggests that the concept of time is highly subjective and multidimensional, influenced strongly by individual and collective values.³

A value is a belief, a mission, or a philosophy that is meaningful.⁴ Whether we are consciously aware of them or not, every individual has a core set of personal values. Values can range from the commonplace, such as the belief in hard work and punctuality, to the more psychological, such as self-reliance, concern for others, and a sense of purpose.

What is the value of your personal time?

The Latin phrase *ceteris paribus*, which means “all things being equal,” is often used in economic theory and modeling in order to indicate that a particular relationship between two quantities holds true, providing that nothing else changes.⁵ Using this model, we can assume that the value of time is a factor of money, and the opportunity cost of leisure time is equal to your wage rate.

A person has a limited quantity of time—24 hours in a day. Using a *ceteris paribus* model, each person has two choices of what to do with that time: work or play. A person who chooses leisure over work must “pay” the wage rate as the cost for each hour that is not worked. To determine the best way to choose between our two goods, leisure and work time, we need to understand utility. Utility is the pleasure, satisfaction, or need fulfillment that people get from their economic activity.

Holding all things constant, a person will maximize utility when the wage rate is equal to the rate at which a person is willing to work one less hour in exchange for one more hour of leisure time. This means that in a simplified world you can optimize your time based on the knowledge that leisure time and work time equal what you are paid for work time.

One of the hardest elements in life is to put a value on your time so that you can better prioritize the activities in your life. We can value time as a factor of money, but what about the intangible value you receive from spending an hour on Saturday afternoon washing the car with your kids? Or, the value that you receive by watching your child’s baseball game on Friday afternoon. Or, even the value you gain by golfing on Friday morning with your buddies, reading a good book, or simply enjoying time with yourself. All of these can have added health and happiness benefits and need to be considered

when valuing your time.

Simply increasing the number or variety of pleasurable activities in daily life is not enough. It is also important to focus intentionally on the pleasurable aspects of those activities, which further increases the impact of pleasure and play on your well-being. Engaging in pleasurable activity is one of the most important steps we can take to maintain physical and mental health and quality of life.

Millions of people are stressed out in this country, both emotionally and physically. Everyone needs to take breaks in order to have balance in life. Yet, our whole system emphasizes the power that time has gained over us. Hundreds of years ago, hardly anyone had a clock. They based the day on when the sun rose and set. Today, we are driven by technology and the clock. We further try to control the sunrise through the use of daylight savings time.

Change causes a loss of equilibrium, which in turn may bring dissatisfaction, lack of commitment, (mid-life) crises, and ultimately affects physical and emotional well-being.

Even when we know we need a change, it’s hard to take the steps that might help. Certainly it can be easier to remain on automatic pilot, continually depending on learned behaviors and actions to guide our lives.

Too little time, anxiety, too many responsibilities, or trying to solve too many problems at once makes change seem overwhelming. It is therefore very important that each of us understand our own needs and priorities. Change forces us to become consciously aware of new choices and options to improve our performance at work and our overall well-being.

Wellness is a process and experience to be lived. Time is something you must own for yourself. ■

1. Johnson S, Blanchard K. *Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life*. 1998. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons.
2. Grawitch M, Gottschalk M, Munz D. The path to a healthy workplace: a critical review linking healthy workplace practices, employee well-being, and organizational improvements. *Consulting Psychology Journal Practice and Research*. 2006;58(3):129-147.
3. Center for Time Use Research. www.timeuse.org/mtus/ Accessed July 21, 2008.
4. Brown D, Crace R. Values and life role decision making. *The Career Development Quarterly*. 1995;44:211-223.
5. Utility functions for *ceteris paribus* preferences. www.mit.edu/mmcgeach/docs/cuc02.pdf McGeachie M, Doyle J. AAAI-02. Accessed August 18, 2008.

*Come out of the circle of time
and into the circle of life.*

Rumi (1207-1273)