

Faster than the Speed of Ohm

“Ain’t no point in going nowhere slowly. You might as well be going nowhere fast.”

Shit! I left my yogurt on the counter, my apple too. I’m running late. I don’t have time to stop somewhere. Shit! Shit! Shit! I knew I shouldn’t have hit that snooze button the 3rd time.

What does that jerk think he’s doing driving 50 in the fast lane? “The speed limit’s 65 buster! Get out of the way!” Of course he can’t hear me. He’s probably listening to classical music.

Wait! I have chocolate in my office! Maybe I can eat that for breakfast. It has protein and it’s supposed to help fight cancer, or something... or maybe that’s green tea. Chocolate tastes better than green tea... but I shouldn’t be eating chocolate for breakfast.

Pasta. I need to get pasta at the store for dinner. I might as well pick up more salad too. There’d better not be too many people in line. I really don’t have time to stand in line tonight.

Damn! I forgot to call Darla back. Well, it’s too early to call her now. She lives in Arizona and won’t be up for hours. One more thing to do tonight. Maybe I’ll call her while I’m standing in line at the grocery store.

Ugh! Kathy’s birthday is this Friday! I forgot to get a card. Maybe she’ll think it’s cool if I send her an e-card. Or maybe she’ll think I’m just too lazy to shop....

Does this sound familiar -- if not the details, then the seemingly endless drone of thoughts? Most of us traipse through life barely aware of where we are and what we are doing because we are so focused on what happened yesterday or what will happen tomorrow, and what we should or should not be doing right now that we rarely experience what it is like to be here now.

Embedded in these thoughts are subtle commands and judgments. We are constantly telling ourselves, and probably others, what we, or they, should be doing or should have done and judging ourselves and others when we or they miss the mark.

And how can anyone hit the mark we’ve set for ourselves and others? Most of us are so busy racing around the fast track at breakneck speeds that we’ve lost touch with reality that it’s a track, like we used to have to run around in our high school PE class, albeit this one is metaphorical. The joke on us is that the faster we run, the quicker the thoughts spin in our heads. And, the faster we spin, the louder the “shoulds” “shouldn’ts” and “judgments” echo.

As a result, we feel compelled to work longer hours and take on extra responsibilities in order to keep up with the Joneses and prove to community members that we are good employees and good citizens. We organize neighborhood parties and schedule in meetings with colleagues, lunches with friends, and religiously check our e-mail and social media accounts. We are so busy “doing” and thinking about what else we need to do or should have done that we don’t give ourselves time to simply “be.”

Not only is this approach to living exhausting, it also makes us stressed and irritable, and less effective. We get so far from ourselves that we leave our breakfast on the counter, forget to pay our bills, pass up our exit on the freeway, leave our laundry in the washing machine for several days, and zone out when we are talking to people, often the very people we worked so hard to squeeze into our already too busy schedule.

So how does one get off the fast track? The easy answer is to just stop running and walk off the track. To bad it’s not usually this easy. What tends to work better is to take short rest breaks, every now and then. Maybe let yourself take a break for 3 minutes where all you do is let yourself breathe and watch your breath. If this seems overwhelming, what would happen if you let yourself do this every time you come up to a red light or get put on hold? Then you can convince yourself that you are actually being productive, employing time management skills to preserve your precious time.

The key here is that you have to slow down. If you can’t slow down on your own, here are some strategies that might help:

- *Get a massage. Sometimes relaxing your muscles can help you relax your mind. And there’s something healing in the human touch.

- *Take a meditation class. Part of the problem a lot of people have with meditation is that they don’t know how to do it. A good class will teach you techniques and help you feel less like a failure because you’ll realize you’re not the only one who has a busy mind.

- *Take a yoga class. Not only will you get some guidance in clearing your mind, you’ll also get the relaxing and mind focusing benefits that yoga poses have on the body.

- *If you’re really spinning, it probably means that you’ve got some major anxiety going on. Rumor has it that counseling can be really helpful. And heck, I happen to know a few really good ones!

Once you slow down, you can look at your life and begin to decide how all those “shoulds,” “shouldn’ts,” and judgments serve you. And perhaps you can loosen the grip of the ones that cost you more than they give back. Better yet, maybe you could stop “shoulding” on yourself and think about things in terms of what would be more or less

helpful. And maybe then you'll realize that running faster than the speed of Ohm is only getting you to nowhere fast.

*Regina Sewell is a mental health counselor with a private practice. To ask a question, propose a column topic, read about her approach to counseling, or check out her books and other writing, go to: www.ReginaSewell.com. Her most recent publication, "Sliding Away" can be found in **Knowing Pains: Women on Love, Sex and Work in Our 40s**, edited by Molly Rosen.*

This article originally appeared in Outlook Columbus in 2009.