Build in transition time

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Regular readers of the Pep Talk Blog and people who know me well might have noticed that I'm a bit obsessed with time. As a child my favorite book was Cheaper By The Dozen, and I've been interested in efficiency ever since. I've often been praised for accomplishing a great deal in a short time period. I'm always looking for faster ways to complete mundane or repeated tasks and I'm often frustrated when things take longer than I think they should. I even time myself on a regular basis. My speed is an asset in many ways.

Admittedly, however, this can also cause problems in personal and work relationships. Not everyone else is as time-oriented as I am, and I haven't yet found a person who appreciates being told they should be doing something more quickly. And I tend to procrastinate on certain items because I assume I can complete them quickly; then when I run into trouble, I barely make it in before the deadline or due date. Of course that causes unnecessary stress for all the other people involved!

I've found a way to tap into my time-oriented nature while becoming easier to deal with: building in transition time.

- While I'm tempted to think my kids should just come running when I yell, "Dinnertime!" it just doesn't work. Of course I realize that's because nobody wants to abruptly stop what they're working on. So I've been trying to give them a heads' up. "Dad says dinner will be ready in 5 minutes, so start wrapping up what you're doing" is working a lot better.

- This strategy has also been helping when it's time to end a visit with family or friends. "Okay kiddos, it's 7:30 and we're planning to leave around 8:00."

- At work, I'm trying hard to not just pull my team members from whatever they're doing, but rather to say, "Hey, when you're finished with this, let's meet about that other project" or to let people know, "Before you leave today I'd like to hear your thoughts about..."

- I still often crash from one task into another, which means I'm sending my brain in a lot of different directions. I am working on stretching, looking away from the computer, taking a few deep breaths, or grabbing a snack to have a moment of transition before starting the next task. It's helping me feel more in control, especially on busy days.

- I had the tendency to arrive "right on time." Of course, that left no room for error with a wrong turn or unexpected traffic, so I was often pushing the limits. And even if everything went smoothly, it gave me no time to use the restroom, apply fresh lipstick, or collect my thoughts. So I've been getting to appointments early and it's made a big difference.

I first became aware of the need for transitions when I attended a conference for the organization I had recently joined. There was no transition time, so the general session was supposed to end at 10:00, with the breakout sessions starting at 10:00. No time for using the restroom or email-checking, let alone traveling to the breakout rooms. And if the general session didn't end until 10:05, we were off schedule for the rest of the day. The first thing I did when I had the chance to build the agenda and serve as emcee was to build in transition time, so if a session ended at 10:00, the breakouts weren't until 10:15. The positive difference was mentioned by several attendees.

I'm trying to make the same difference in my own life. Do you need to build transition time into yours?