

Reclaim Yesterday, Enjoy Today,  
and Master Tomorrow

# The Time Paradox

The New Psychology of Time  
That Will Change Your Life



"Comprehensive,  
admirably clear, and  
a delightful read."  
—Nassim Nicholas Taleb,  
author of *The Black Swan*

**Philip Zimbardo**

Author of the *New York Times* Bestseller  
*THE LUCIFER EFFECT*

and **John Boyd**

Written Summary

<http://bestbookbits.com/the-time-paradox-summary-by-philip-zimbardo-and-john-boyd/>

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Just as fish may be unaware of the existence of the water in which they swim, most of us are unaware of the ceaselessly flowing time in which we live.

How you spend today ultimately determines both your past and future.

A financial planner helps to determine your investment strategy based upon your personal investment goals. If only there were such a person to call upon for investing time! Asking: What do you want out of life? How can you make your time matter? What is the right use of your time?

90% of the students that were late (told to rush across campus) didn't stop to help a homeless person, even though they were being tested on compassion. They were in a future-oriented mindset.

Future-oriented people tend to be more successful professionally and academically, to eat well, to exercise regularly, and to schedule preventative doctor's exams. But they are the least likely to help others in need.

Present-oriented people tend to be willing to help others, but appear less willing or able to help themselves. They're more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior, to gamble, to use drugs and alcohol than future-oriented people are. They are also less likely to exercise, eat well, and engage in preventative health such as flossing and getting regular exams. They are the least likely to be successful.

Psychoanalysis stresses the importance of the past. Existential psychotherapy stresses the importance of the present. Humanistic psychotherapy stresses the importance of the future.

In a typical day, you make hundreds of decisions: What to wear, what to eat, what to do with your free time, with whom to associate, and whom to avoid. On any given day, these decisions appear trivial, even inconsequential. Taken as a whole, they define who you were, who you are, and who you will become.

Death is the end of a lifetime. Denial of death is a denial that time will end. If you deny that time ends, you are likely to treat time much differently than you would if you felt time to be scarce and of limited duration. If you imagine your life as infinite, you are unlikely to value time as more precious than gold and more likely to treat it as ordinary grains of sand on a beach. Ironically, denying death relieves anxiety and psychological stress, but it may also lead you to devalue life, so you may live less fully.

When faced with routine decisions, people conserve their thought cycles and rely instead on mental heuristics - simple, practical rules of thumb that we learn through trial and error. We save our judgement and decision-making skills for thinking about the novel, unpredictable, and dangerous forces in our lives: for predicting the future.

"No man who is correctly informed as to the past will be disposed to take a morose or desponding view of the present." - Thomas Babington Macaulay

#### SIX TIME PERSPECTIVES:

- Past-negative
- Past-positive
- Present-fatalistic
- Present-hedonistic
- Future
- Transcendental-future

Take the tests at <http://www.thetimeparadox.com> to find your type.

Another present-oriented time zone can be called the Holistic Present. It involves

training to live one's life in the present moment and to include past and future in an expanded state of focus on the present.

The Crypt of the Capuchin Monks: "What you are, they once were. What they are, you will be."

Live meaningfully and fully the lives we are living right now.

Robert Levine measured the pace of life in 36 American cities by recording walking speed, bank teller speed, talking speed, and the frequency that watches are worn. Boston, NYC and other Northeast cities are the fastest cities in America. Southern and Western are the slowest. Los Angeles is the slowest of all. Cities with the fastest pace of life were the least helpful (Good Samaritan research). Los Angeles was unique for being slowest and least helpful.

\*\*\* THE PAST:

Your ability to cast your time consciously in a positive light is a good indicator of psychological and emotional health.

You can reinterpret and rewrite your personal past, which can give you a greater sense of control over the future.

How we think and feel today influences how we remember yesterday.

After being shown an ad talking about the wonders of Disneyland, including shaking hands with Bugs Bunny, people were asked about their own memories of visiting Disneyland. 16 percent vividly remembered shaking hands with Bugs Bunny, even though there's no Bugs Bunny at Disneyland. (His a Warner Brothers character.)

It's not the events of the past that most strongly influence our lives. Our attitude toward events in the past matter more than the events themselves.

WHO WAS I? Answer 20 times (forcing into creativity)

I was \_\_\_\_\_

I was \_\_\_\_\_

List 3 significant events that have occurred in your life:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

What positive messages can be taken from these events?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

How can these lessons improve your future?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Complete a Gratitude List each day for two weeks. At the end of each day, simply write a list of things for which you were grateful that day.

"To be able to enjoy one's past is to live twice." - Martial (1st century Roman poet)

If the people in a culture that uses the past to evaluate current situations share a past trauma, they are likely to want revenge.

To the extent that people share positive views of the past, they seek to maintain the status quo culturally and politically.

In a global economy, nations that live in the past will be left behind.

Those with most involvement with their families are highly past-positive.

### \*\*\* THE PRESENT:

Our lives start with a natural focus on the present, but some people continue to focus on present biological stimulation into adulthood, responding only to events happening in their immediate physical and social environment.

Some present information is needed to enjoy life. Too much present orientation can rob life of happiness.

People in volatile economies do not invest. Political and economic instability also causes instability within families and causes people to trust only what they can hold in their hands. The development of a future orientation requires stability and consistency in the present.

Less educated people are more likely to live in the present. Societies that offer less opportunity for education are likely to have more citizens whose focus is limited to the present.

When women's educational level advances, their children and social class also advance.

Ambition and a need for achievement drive a future orientation that focuses on work, savings, and planning for a continually better life through one's efforts.

Present-oriented top athletes or rock stars also worked hard for their money, but many also retained a present perspective that biases them toward addictive behaviors.

Robert Levine fascinating book: A Geography of Time

Hedonistic people enjoy all things that yield pleasure and avoid things that cause pain. Beyond passive enjoyment, hedonists actively seek pleasure. They arrange their choices in life around activities and relationships that are pleasurable, arousing, stimulating, exciting, and novel. They focus on immediate gratification, self-stimulation, and short-term payoffs. Such people avoid people and situations that are tedious, that require high effort and maintenance, or that are regularized or boring.

They are playful and impulsive at all ages, undertaking play and pleasant leisure activities for their intrinsic worth and continuing them as long as they do not become boring.

On the negative side, they are likely to have undercontrolled egos, to prefer inconsistency in their lives, to have weak impulse control, and to be less conscientious and emotionally stable than others. On the positive side, they make good friends, lovers, and party guests. They enjoy other people as a source of stimulation, as long as the others are not boring.

(Phil Z tripping:) The sensual sensations occurred only when his time sense was expanded.

The present perspective has both good and bad effects, though the good generally offset the bad. Hedonists live active high-intensity lives, filled with as much excitement, novelty, and spontaneity as possible. They engage in diverse activities, sports, and hobbies. They learn early to make friends and lovers easily and frequently, and are apt to fill their lives with people whom they find stimulating and with possessions they can show off. If they have enough money, they take great joy in living, appreciating nature, animals, and people around them. People like to be with them because, like children, they have an open-eyed readiness to connect and an intensity that comes from being totally in the moment. The demands of the to-do list never dilute their here-and-now. They generally do not make lists, and when they do, forget to check them.

Sensuality is central. They are always open to sensory input, taking time to smell the proverbial roses and to touch.

Future-oriented folks can also become totally absorbed in their work: get into the flow.

Characteristics of FLOW:

- Clear goals
- Concentrating and focusing
- Loss of self-consciousness
- Distorted sense of time
- Balance between ability level and challenge (not too easy or too hard)
- Personal control over the situation or activity
- The activity is intrinsically rewarding, so there's an effortlessness of action

Flow is involvement in the process of whatever you are doing. When in flow, you are not focused on the product of the process in which you are engaged. When we are concerned about the product, we worry about how it will be judged, evaluated, accepted, and rejected.

Painting: Half the group was told they would be judged, half told to focus on process. Present hedonists painting in the process condition were most creative. Futures painting in the product condition produced paintings with the most technical merit.

Immediate large rewards that result in large delayed punishments and overall net loss: has the effect like reverse binoculars, making the future small and remote, not allowing it to affect current decisions and actions.

Programs like DARE focus on aversive future consequences that work for future-oriented people but not for present-oriented: the target audience. They focus on personal willpower, which fails to recognize powerful situational and social forces in the present behavioral context that influence Hedonists and Fatalists more than they do others.

WHO AM I? Answer 20 times

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

When am I \_\_\_\_\_

When am I \_\_\_\_\_

Where am I \_\_\_\_\_

Where am I \_\_\_\_\_

How do I feel \_\_\_\_\_

How do I feel \_\_\_\_\_

What happens when many people in any society live in the present? They are all late! They are never on time!

\*\*\*\* THE FUTURE:

Ratomir Dujkovic brought to the present-oriented Ghana team a Balkan discipline that featured a highly focused future time perspective and insistence on discipline. Instilled discipline, toughness, goal-scoring and punctuality most important. High expectations of future success. When they combined their present-oriented creativity with their newfound future desire to win, they came in eighth-finals for World Cup, only losing to Brazil (2006).

The mantra of a Future is "meet tomorrow's deadline, complete all the necessary work before tonight's play". Futures consider work a source of special pleasure. Tomorrow's anticipated gains and losses fuel today's decisions and actions.

Unlike their Hedonistic peers who live in their bodies, the Futures live in their minds, envisioning other selves, scenarios, rewards, and successes.

The soccer team's belief in its own strength and high level of performance: they believed that they could influence the future by working hard in the present.

When you want to achieve something and you believe that you can, you work harder.

Environment that creates Future-oriented people:

- living in a temperate zone
- living in a stable family
- being Protestant or Jewish
- becoming educated
- being a young or middle-aged adult
- having a job
- using technology regularly

- being successful
- having future-oriented role models
- recovering from childhood illness

Preparing for seasonal change involves planning, so people become used to anticipating worse weather in winter and summer. Living in a mildly tropical climate is being in paradise with an extended lease.

Early repeated failure breeds a sense of helplessness and makes you shun that area of performance where you failed.

Learning that a hero became successful through hard work, effort, practice, and self-denial in order to pursue a dream inspires emulation of that person.

MAZE: When challenged to solve puzzles as quickly as they could, the Presents and Futures responded very differently. The Presents started immediately from the start, moving their pencils through the maze. The Futures did not move at all at first, looking for the goal, then working backwards to the starting point, checking out dead ends en route. The Futures always won.

People discontinue physical rehabilitation because it hurts more to do the regimen than to quit it. Futures endure the pain for the short term because of the long-term gain it provides.

Futures are competitive when negotiating deals or arguing.

Tragedy of the commons: the selfish prevail over the farsighted because shorter-term individual yields would be greater than the communal, longer-term gain. The common good is not a moral matter but a time-perspective matter.

WHO WILL I BE? Answer 15 times:

I will be \_\_\_\_\_

I will be \_\_\_\_\_

Concrete future goal: \_\_\_\_\_ Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Concrete future goal: \_\_\_\_\_ Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Mentally rehearse reaching goals. Focus on the outcome. Rehearse the individual steps, step-by-step.

\*\*\*\* TRANSCENDENTAL FUTURE:

Because there is no possibility of contradictory evidence, belief in the transcendental future may be especially resistant to change.

"In every deliberation, we must consider the impact on the 7th generation, even if it requires having skin as thick as the bark of a pine." - Iroquois Indian saying.

We will win the war on terror not by destroying our enemy's future but by nurturing it. The motivational power of the mundane future must be restored if mundane

future goals are to compete with transcendental-future goals. Only by building a mundane future full of hope, optimism, respect, health, and prosperity can the motivational power of the transcendental future be balanced.

Doing so requires replacing past-negatives and present-fatalistic time perspectives with past-positive and present-hedonistic ones. We have to respect people for their pasts and allow them to enjoy the present. Provide adequate resources and opportunities to those who lack them: food, shelter, money, education, employment, recreation, relaxation, and community celebration. Instill a sense of personal responsibility for seizing a desirable opportunity. Individual initiative must be encouraged and rewarded. Supplementing transcendental-future time perspectives with more practical future time perspectives. (Expecting people to change their transcendental-future beliefs is insulting and exacerbates conflict.) Offer hope, opportunity, and fulfillment in the future on the way to the Promised Land. The development of a future time perspective requires stable political, economic, and family conditions. People must believe that their actions today will lead to predictable and desirable rewards in the future.

### \*\*\* TIME, BODY, HEALTH

Circadian rhythm comes from Latin "circa" (around) "dies" (day) : means "about a day".

Car accidents increase by 10% the day after clocks are set forward in the spring, and decrease by a smaller amount the day after clocks are set back in the fall.

Dangerous events often restrict time perspective to the present. Under acute stress, refugees narrowed their view to a highly focused present.

Fear and excitement heighten our present awareness, sharpen our instincts, and help us survive.

Emotions deal with the present. Thinking prepares for the future.

Depressed people look not to the future but to the past to relieve their depression. They feel that rehashing and rehearsing the causes of their symptoms will somehow help to solve their problems. This quickly deteriorates into a vicious downward spiral that exacerbates the severity and length of depression.

An obsessive focus on the past makes people less able to think about the future. Maintaining past-negative attitudes by thinking and talking about them repeatedly is not a good strategy. Put the past to rest and build on it the vision of a better future.

Women on Dr. Phil's show: had never consciously chosen to be fat, but then had chosen what they ate from a purely present-oriented perspective, without regard for consequences.

### \*\*\* TIME AND MONEY

The ability to delay gratification at age 4 is twice as good a predictor of later SAT scores as IQ.

Your chronological time - time passed since birth - is as relevant as your sense of the time remaining until your death.

Anything that constrains our sense of an unlimited future shifts our motivations and priorities away from future goals and toward present emotional satisfaction. A limited future encourages us to make choices that enhance our positive emotional state rather than, for instance, to pursue an education or other future-oriented activity. Because older people anticipate a limited future, they are more apt to do what feels good - from speaking their minds to travelling to making dramatic changes in their lives. The same may be said for anyone who is in a situation that portends an uncertain future or clearly defined end, such as having a terminal disease or losing a job.

We regulate our emotions to try to maintain a sense of overall well-being. When you imagine that you have a lot of time left, you use it to learn more about the world, meet new people, and experience novelty. When a life's time is short, its goals become more short-term. Those who anticipate a long-term future say "more is better" and look to spend time with a lot of different people and new acquaintances. Those who anticipate a short future is "quality not quantity", and they choose to spend quality time with fewer people.

Men who have not established a convoy of buddies (a reliable group of friends) by early adulthood may never do so, and may go through life with few or no close friends.

Seek knowledge about yourself and your world. Look for help doing so from a range of experts and variety of acquaintances.

Learning to control impulses and make better choices is inextricably connected with being aware of one's internal states and with managing feelings rather than acting them out. Emotions rather than reason tend to drive the behavior of people who have poor impulse control. Impulsivity is the hallmark of present-hedonistic adolescents, but many carry it over into adulthood.

Thrill wins over will.

We sometimes delude ourselves that we proceed in a rational manner and weigh all of the pros and cons of various alternatives. But this is seldom the actual case. Quite often "I decided in favor of X" is no more than "I liked X". We buy the cars we like, choose the jobs and houses we find attractive, then justify these choices by various reason.

If we always chose the consequences of our actions when we chose those actions, none of us would be fat, drink, smoke, or fail examinations by not studying. Future-oriented people believe that when you choose a behavior, you choose its future consequences. But sometimes you do not choose a behavior. Sometimes a behavior chooses you based upon the environment in which you find yourself.

Queen Elizabeth said she'd "trade all my possessions for a moment of time". There were no takers.

Pasts are more interested in preserving money. Present Fatalists treat money as though it doesn't matter. Hedonists use their money to create fun and excitement. Futures feel time and money denote possibilities for the future.

### \*\*\* LOVE AND HAPPINESS

Couples with mismatched time perspectives will be prone to miscommunication and misunderstanding.

How do you bridge the gap in the languages of time? You start with the present. The present is the bridge from the past to the future. The present is the meeting place for good as well as difficult times. When two people are arguing, they can be tempted to leave the bridge of the present and become lost in the fog of the past or imagined future, losing their connection.

By always looking through the present to the next goal, you likely do not fully appreciate the present.

Buddhist student worked for years to see the master. Ascended to a mountaintop and waited for days. The master finally acknowledged the student by asking, "At the beginning of the trail that leads to this mountaintop, there is a sign on one side of the trail. On which side is it?" Mindfulness matters more than abstract knowledge.

"Success is a peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming." - John Wooden

Identify the things in your life that make you happy, and do more of them.  
Identify the things in your life that make you unhappy, and do less of them.

By being mindful, you may be able to detect the influence of your environment with you want to be rid of it.

### \*\*\* BUSINESS, POLITICS AND TIME:

(Enron:) Greed dissolved future orientation and replaced it with a present orientation that excluded the prospect of getting caught.

Great leaders are able to become completely engrossed in the present and to harness the passion they generate in the service of future goals. They have a unique ability to be fully in the moment and to make an audience feel that they are the exclusive focus of their attention. Then they use the energy they generate by their present focus to create a compelling vision of the future.

The unexpected occurs when the future doesn't turn out the way you thought it would. The unexpected can signal unexpected success or unexpected failure. Both

have their virtues.

When the unexpected chance event happens, it is more likely that future-oriented people will understand what it means and how to capitalize on it, because they have already invested in education and have learned to focus on contingencies and causal thinking. They can quickly go from "aha" to "so that's it!" because they are prepared to take the new and put it in familiar old molds or create new ones that fit better.

Future goals can help us avoid the urgent-new trap. Once we've determined whether we want fame, fortune, happiness, excitement, quiet, comfort, some, or all of the above, then we can decide how to best spend our time achieving them.

People are generally risk-averse in the domain of gains. This means that people avoid risk after having secured a sure gain.

Students: Ill-defined and unrealistic goals (brain surgeon, rock star, NBA superstar) were replaced with specific well-defined goals that they could reasonably meet.

When a person does not have a concept of the future or believes there is no future for him, the future cannot be taken from him.

### \*\*\* RESETTING YOUR CLOCK

"To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time." - Leonard Bernstein

The optimal time perspective profile is:

- high in past-positive
- moderately high in future
- moderately high in present-hedonistic
- low in past-negative
- low in present-fatalistic

Choose the time perspective most appropriate for each situation. Open your eyes to the full range of human experience. Depending on the demands of a situation, one time perspective must take precedence, while others may temporarily recede. When you have work to finish, the future time perspective comes to the forefront. When your work is done, and it's time for pleasure, the present-hedonistic time perspective will surface. During the holidays, the past-positive time perspective is most appropriate for preparing you to enjoy family customs.

Self actualizing person: Tie the past and the future to the present in meaningful continuity. Not burdened by guilts, regrets, and resentments. Aspirations are tied meaningfully to present working goals. Faith in the future without rigid or over-idealistic goals.

### \*\*\* OUT OF TIME

The Golden Rule of time: Use your time as you would like others to use theirs.

#### Past-oriented people:

- 1- They are generally more concerned with their past and seem to be able to distance themselves from the realities of the present or the future.
- 2- They usually tend to be traditional, religious, and conservative.
- 3- They have a stable sense of self.
- 4- They usually tend to be family- and group-oriented and are distrustful of strangers; thus they may have a tendency to be prejudiced.
- 5- They usually focus on their obligations and commitments whether personal or collective (i.e. family, cultural, or tribal obligations).
- 6- Rituals and myths play important roles in their lives.
- 7- They may have guilt as a dominant feeling.
- 8- They usually try to maintain the status quo and thus may not be progressive.
- 9- They usually do not take risks and are not adventurous.
- 10- Within their group, they usually tend to be dependent and cooperative rather than competitive.

#### Present-oriented people:

- 1- They tend to focus on the present and their current sensations, feelings, and concerns while ignoring commitments made in the past or for the future; thus they are more concerned with "what is" than "what was" or "what may be".
- 2- Their thinking is more concrete rather than abstract (i.e. one hundred dollar right now is much better than two hundred dollars in the future).
- 3- It is difficult for them to give up temptations or delay gratification and thus they are easily distracted from the performance of necessary current tasks and tend to be procrastinators.
- 4- They tend to concentrate on activities that bring pleasure and avoid pain.
- 5- Their knowledge or insight may not deter them from performing actions that may not be beneficial to them.
- 6- They are usually more sensation and novelty seekers, more aggressive, more depressed, less conscientious, and less emotionally stable. They have less concern for future consequences, less ego and impulse control, and less preference for consistency. They also tend to lie.
- 7- Usually people who are poor or uneducated tend to be present-oriented since they usually tend to focus on emergent needs of the present.
- 8- Since they are not good in abstract thinking, are more concerned with immediate gratification, and less concerned about the future, they usually tend to get low grades in school.
- 9- Because they are immediate pleasure seekers, they usually don't pay good attention to their health and can additionally abuse substances.
- 10- They are usually considered to be fun people to be around.

#### Future-oriented people:

- 1- They are more focused on their future than the present or the past; their thoughts are concerned with the future consequences of their present actions; they logically analyze various outcomes that may result from their action.
- 2- They are goal-oriented and can delay gratification and endure an unpleasant situation in order to achieve long-term goals. They pay attention to responsibility, liability, efficiency, distant payoffs, and tend to optimize future outcomes. Thus they can work hard and avoid temptations, distractions, waste of time to accomplish a

goal. They usually tend to rehearse various future plans.

3- Since they are concerned about the future, they tend to save their money and resources.

4- They could be either cooperative or competitive depending on which action results in the best outcome.

5- They tend to be health-conscious in order to prevent future negative health outcomes.

6- They may be unable to enjoy fun activities due to the fear of wasting time.

7- They may have difficulty in intimate relationships since they thrive on control, predictability, and consistency, factors that may interfere with the freedom and spontaneity of relationships.

8- Although they usually have low anxiety levels, concern for the future may increase their anxiety. They usually tend to be workaholic, and have midlife crises.

9- They tend to be more conscientious, less aggressive, less depressed, more reward-dependent, less sensation seeker, more studious, more creative, and use less addictive drugs and alcohol.

10- They tend to have more self-esteem, energy, openness, ego-control, and grade-point average.

Time paradoxes:

Four main paradoxes are:

1- Time is one of the most powerful influences on our thoughts, feelings, and actions, yet we are usually totally unaware of the affect of time in our lives.

2- We can buy food, objects, space (i.e. land), but not time. Once we lose time, we lose it forever.

3- Each specific attitude toward time--or time perspective--is associated with numerous benefits, yet in excess each is associated with even greater costs.

4- Individual attitudes toward time are learned through personal experience, yet collectively attitudes toward time influence national destinies.

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