

Title: Do Pause – You are not a To Do List (2019)

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My Story:

Over many years I have worked with a wonderful lady Maggie Farrar, and during lockdown she offered free Mindfulness sessions to educational leaders. I have always been a person with a beyond-full diary, but I love everything that I do so much, that I don't want to give anything up. But with the never-ending to do list on my mind, the idea of sitting around for a while doing 'nothing' in order to do mindfulness was something I couldn't get my head around. I knew if there was someone that could convince me of the benefits of a pause it would be Maggie. So I gave her sessions a whirl, and although the specific practices haven't stuck, a book recommendation came out of the group activity that has been revelatory – the book is 'Do Pause' by Robert Poynton.

Why do I think this is a great book?

This book works in the real world, acknowledging that the world is speeding up and if you make slowing down an aim then you will always be disappointed - and this tension will bring stress. Instead, it says that if you can't change the pace of the world, you can react positively to it, reframing how you see and use time so that with small changes you can create a more positive relationship with all the things that we try to fit into life.

It suggests that 'work-life balance' may actually not be something to strive for. Why should the two things be in opposition? Why should it be a battle? There are things that we get from 'work' that are key to life, companionship, satisfaction, challenge and growth. And then there are elements of 'life' that may be more structured, feel like drudgery or indeed be stressful. Time is more nuanced than this well-used distinction.

Pause is not an absence of something, but something essential. A pause can be any length - even a small amount of yeast can lighten the dough. A pause is an opening, an opportunity to look up and see things differently, and in doing so you can be more efficient and effective. Or it might be more extended time out to revisit, refresh and rejuvenate. But a pause is deliberate. Choosing where you put your pauses can give you back control and you can play around with how you reorganise time.

The big reflection for me is that time isn't all the same – you can label it as you wish, and in doing so, create opportunities to modulate time so that you move between different chunks, with pause in the middle, so that you don't get exhausted. I found it really valuable to re-categorise my time – I stopped thinking in terms of work, home admin, cooking and tidying and instead created my own labelling as the book suggests. I now have 'Hand, Head and Heart Time' which I try to intersperse. Examples of this are that cooking, cleaning and going to the allotment are now 'Hand' activities, whilst the admin, work and reading are all 'Head' things that I use my brain for. 'Heart' stuff is seeing friends, family TV time, a walk with my daughter. So now instead of seeing some of these as 'taking up time', I try to see them as offering different benefits, allowing me to vary the pace and type of time I utilise, and in between these chunks there is also inevitably more pause!

Final Comment:

Over the Christmas period we may feel like we should have more time than normal - but for sure it will fly by; so perhaps plan in advance for how you can really pause in this period. Then maybe reflect on some new ideas for how you can consciously plan for more pauses in the coming year too.

I still haven't planned a week in the Tuscan hills to really pause and reflect as the author suggests, but maybe something similar should be in my mind for the New Year.