CHAPTER 11

Key Catalyst: This Is It!

Each moment, each task counts. Develop the ability to focus your attention on the present moment. How much attention you pay to now determines the quality of your tomorrow.

What You’ll Discover in This Chapter:

• Secret wisdom is revealed to you when you focus on the now
• What to say back to that little voice that tries to distract you from the moment
• How to turn boring tasks into magic moments
Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry—all forms of fear—are caused by too much future and not enough present.
—Eckhart Tolle, The Power of Now

A friend of mine told me she used to have trouble living in the now. She was always focused on what was coming five or ten years down the road. When she was in college, she couldn’t wait to graduate and tackle the “real world.” When she was starting her career, she couldn’t stop obsessing about getting married and starting her family. Then when the kids came, she was forever daydreaming about life after wiping runny noses and sitting through Little League games. Her kids couldn’t grow up quick enough to suit her.

Then one day she was standing in line at the grocery store going over future plans in her mind, nearly oblivious to her two grade-schoolers bantering cutely beside her. She half-noticed an elderly woman standing in line behind them, smiling at the children’s antics. Just as the friend was finishing her check-out, the elderly woman tugged at her sleeve and, with a twinkle in her eye, whispered, “You know this is the best time of your life, don’t you?”

My friend felt a tingle. She knew she’d been told something. She thought, “My kids are with me now; they won’t always be. If I wish away these next ten years, I’ll never get this time back.”

Are you like my friend, waiting for the next moment while the present one slips away?

We all struggle with this tendency. We get bored, distracted, anxious. We fall victim to the “grass is greener” syndrome, thinking what’s coming has to be better than what’s here. We’re always looking ahead for something more exciting. But when we do this,
we pay a price. We miss out on the only part of our lives where we can actually make a difference—the only part of lives where we actually live: now.

For another thing, it’s more fun to live in the now. Think of it this way: how much do you like waiting? If you’re forever waiting for the future to arrive, you’re waiting—forever. There’s no value in frittering away the present over the future because the future never arrives. The only moment that counts is the one that’s already in your hands. This is it!

When you’re fully engaged in the now, life is more exciting and fulfilling. You’ll enjoy what you’re doing more, get more out of it, and be better at it.

For another thing, focusing on the present changes your perspective. When you put all your energy into the current task, you are living with the maximum vibrancy. You begin to see each task differently. You will focus, maximizing your intensity. You’ll see solutions you didn’t recognize before. You’ll come up with shortcuts for routine tasks. And you’ll develop greater insight and intuition about what you’re doing.

When you live fully in the present, you take full advantage of the gifts that are coming your way. You learn the lessons the current task has to offer. You seize the moment. You gather your rosebuds while you may, and you also take the opportunity to hand out a few. Living in the now doesn’t just make you more effective; it’s the only way to be effective, because it’s the only chance you have to make an impact. Imagine a champion tennis player, like Venus Williams or Roger Federer, not living in the now. You can’t do anything about the past, and the only thing you can do about the future is make tentative plans. But, as all champion athletes know, when you live in the now, you have the power.

It’s an awesome tool.
The Value of Time

To realize the value of *one year*, ask the student who failed a grade.

To realize the value of *one month*, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby.

To realize the value of *one week*, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realize the value of *one hour*, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realize the value of *one minute*, ask a person who missed the bus.

To realize the value of *one second*, ask the person who just avoided an accident.

To realize the value of *one millisecond*, ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics.

—Anonymous

We once had an inspiring SuperCamp participant named John who made a tremendous impact on the staff as well as on his fellow campers. He walked on crutches, but rather than let that slow him down or dampen his spirits, he was one of the most enthusiastic participants—in every activity—that we’ve ever had. He even lifted the spirits of another camper with a serious physical disability. Whenever the other camper started feeling sorry for himself, John would bring him back to the pure joy of the present and the power of keeping a “This is it” attitude no matter what life has dealt you. He was the living embodiment of throwing himself joyfully into the moment.

When people live in the now, it affects everyone around them.
There’s another compelling reason to live in the present: It’s the single greatest determiner of the quality of your tomorrows. If you spend this moment focused on tomorrow, you sabotage the quality of those tomorrows. Only by focusing on what you’re doing now can you affect what your life will be like in the future. Waste the present fretting about the future, then when the future becomes the now, it will come with little reward.

Each Task Counts; Each Event Teaches

When you live each moment knowing that this is it, you’ll be able to see what people who are frittering away the present don’t see: every moment has a gift.

You’ll discover that every moment has something to teach you—if you’re looking for the lesson. Even if it’s a task you’ve done a thousand times, there’s something new to see in it, or a new way to look at it, if you’re prepared to look.

You’ll find that every moment presents a chance that may never come again, whether it’s an opportunity to commend, apologize, make a friend, say thank you, or make a difference. These little magical opportunities can come and go in a twinkling. You’ll miss most of them if you’re not on the lookout.

And sometimes, when you take your focus off the future and put it back onto the present, you’ll find that the things you were daydreaming about are not in some far-off other time, but right under your nose.

The work I do often requires me to jump into the moment. Once when a charter school system had finalized all the details for Quantum Learning in their schools, I attended a meeting to celebrate the event and to tell the excited crowd more about our programs. I was on my way up to the stage when someone
pulled me aside and told me funding for Quantum Learning had been cut from the grant at the last moment. Instead of the enthusiastic speech I had planned, I had to improvise a speech of an entirely different nature.

Another time I went on a speaking tour in China that took me far from my comfort zone. Rather than knowing the topic and preparing well in advance, I would arrive at each new stop with no idea what I would be expected to say. I’d sometimes discover the topic on the way to the podium. By the end of that tour, I’d learned a lot about thinking on my feet!

How to Make This Moment It—Especially if It’s Not What You Expected

How do you become distracted from the moment? Often we get ambushed by that nagging little voice that whispers to us about chores to be done, unfinished projects, worries, regrets, inadequacies, and a never-ending swarm of “what-ifs,” most of which never come to pass. That voice is always trying to steal your attention away from the task at hand.

That insidious voice in your head not only devours your focus, it can also eat away at your self-confidence. It whispers defeatist messages: “You don’t know how to do that. You’re not smart enough. People will think you’re crazy. What will your mother think?”

It’s difficult to resist that little voice. If it tells us we’re going to fail, often as not, we will fail.

How do you end the tyranny of the little voice? You take control of it. You turn it to your advantage. First, make yourself aware of what it’s telling you. Move that voice to the forefront of your consciousness and expose its messages. Whenever you hear that voice make a negative comment, counter it with a positive one. When it tries to tell you that you can’t, say, “Yes, I can.”
Sometimes you don't focus on the moment simply because you don't enjoy the task at hand. It’s not the voice’s fault at times like these. Sometimes you just get bored, tired, or lonely. Then what?

You could easily make the mistake of focusing on something else when you’re doing a task you don’t like—a kind of mental chewing gum to distract you from the unpleasantness of the moment. But doing this is a mistake, because then you miss the gift that moment has to offer you.

Instead of avoiding the task, reframe it. Change the way you look at it. When you don’t like a task, discover the value in it. If you can’t uncover enough value in the task itself, then find it in the character you’re building by performing it.

If you want to find the true importance in any given task, call up the big picture. Weigh what you’re doing now against your vision and see where it fits in. Make it a habit.

Living in the now gets easier with practice. Try using a device to remind yourself: a watch or a ring, a sticker on your phone, or an object with “This is it!” written on it. Whenever you find you’re drifting away from the moment, pull yourself back into the now.

When you recognize that this moment is it, you’re open to the gifts it has to offer. Some of the best memories I have are all about being fully present in simple moments. Eating lemon meringue pie with my dad and talking about how airplanes fly. Asking him how refrigerators worked. Eating cooked blueberries in the kitchen late at night. Telling stories with my grandkids in their hideout under the basement stairs. Watching tiger lily blossoms open with my husband Joe. Little moments contain great magic.
This Is It!

• Living in the moment is more fun than living in some imagined future.
• When that little voice tries to distract you, talk back. Tell it you’re up to the challenge.
• Reframe: transform boring tasks into moments of inspiration by focusing on the big picture.
• Focus on the now, and you’ll seize opportunities to learn, love, connect, and transform.
• When your worries are so strong that you can’t focus on the now, stop what you’re doing and analyze your options. Make an action plan. Then go back to the now.