

STEPHEN CHERRY

BEYOND BUSYNESS

Time Wisdom *for* Ministry

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DR TIM LING



SESSION 2

Time Traps for Clergy

One of the bestselling time management books is called *The Time Trap*. In the first edition the author Alec Mackenzie listed twenty time traps that prevented people in business and technology achieving their goals. In the fourth edition a new writer, Pat Nickerson, has done some further research and revised the list. Here are the top five items in the more recent edition.

1. Management by Crisis (this was top in the first list too)
2. Inadequate Planning (moved up from third place and incorporated “lack of self discipline” which was previously eighth)
3. Inability to Say No. (formerly ninth)
4. Poor Communication (a big rise from seventeenth)
5. Poorly Run Meetings (this was twelfth)

One of the most surprising things about this is that poor communication has risen such a long way up the table over a period where the amount of technological support for communicating has risen exponentially. The problem, it would seem, is not with the gadgets but with the people using them. There must be more to communicating clearly than sending many emails or texts or tweets or building a website or writing a blog or carrying around enough processing capacity to run a large international business or medium sized country.

The problem is not our lack of technology, but our lack of skill and wisdom.

However, poor communication is not the number one issue. At the top of the list comes “management by crisis”. This, I think translates in clergy speak into the “busy me” syndrome. Management by crisis means that we don’t have time to do this (whatever it is) properly. We don’t have time to plan it carefully. We don’t have time to identify the risks. We don’t have time to form a project team, delegate responsibility or clarify roles.

Management by crisis is not crisis management. That’s a legitimate and important responsibility for leaders as and when crises come about, and they always will. Management by crisis is more a state of mind which either believes that there must be crisis before action is required or which goes about creating a sense of crisis to get others motivated.

Management by crisis creates the second trap—inadequate planning. Yet it is itself perhaps created by trap number three, the inability to say “no”. In fact, if asked to identify the root problem this is where I would go. It is only the person who can say “no” who can say “yes” with sincerity. It is when we say “no” that we cash in our freedom and autonomy which are the basis of the value of our actions when we say “yes”. You should never say “never”, but you should, when necessary, say “no”.

The mediaeval theologians were convinced that the root sin is pride. If they were right, and the root time problem is the inability to say “no”, then might there be a connection between pride and the failure to say “no”? I think there might be. The pride being the arrogance which says, “Yes, of course I can do anything.” The humble truth is that you can’t and the sooner you realise that the better for you and for everyone else.

Time for Reflection

- ◆ Which one of the top five time traps are you most likely to fall into?
- ◆ When did you last say “no”?

Food for Thought

Why are deadlines so powerful? Why do they motivate us when everything else fails? Why do we let them distort our priorities?

The word “deadline” has its origins in military prisons. It is the point beyond which the prisoner would not be allowed to run while escaping. When they crossed the “deadline” escaping prisoners would be shot.

Maybe this explains why we find deadlines so terrifying and yet exhilarating. They combine the prospect of liberation with the fear of sudden death.

Why Not . . . ?

Write your own list of “time traps” for clergy and discuss it with some colleagues.

BEYOND BUSYNESS

Time Wisdom for Ministry

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Beyond Busyness abounds with practical wisdom for those engaged in Christian Ministry. At a time when busyness, anxiety and stress characterise the lives of many of the Church's ministers, Stephen Cherry has written a much-needed book. It very effectively challenges ministers to reflect on how they approach and use the gift of time. Each of the short 28 sessions offers considerable insight into the nature of time and encourages ministers to confront their current habits and develop new life-giving practices through which their ministry can thrive and they can flourish. Every minister should spend time not only reading *Beyond Busyness* but integrating its wisdom into their lives.

DR JOCELYN BRYAN

Director of Postgraduate Studies, St John's College, Durham University

STEPHEN CHERRY is a Residentiary Canon of Durham Cathedral, Director of Ministerial Development and Parish Support in the Diocese of Durham, and author of *Healing Agony* and the Archbishop of Canterbury's 2011 Lent Book, *Barefoot Disciple*.



Beyond Busyness takes us into a new way of understanding how to control our time in a way which will enable personal and spiritual development.

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