



Never Too Late (or Too Early) to Be On Time

Dennis Coyne

As I left the house running to an appointment, my daughter said: “Dad, your shoes are untied”. I replied: “I don’t have time to tie them.” After all, I didn’t want to be late.

The Virtues and Benefits of Being on Time

For good reason, we calibrate our lives in reference to the watch we wear, the clock on the wall, or the smartphone in our hand. Being punctual is a virtue. We make commitments and we want to keep them. We also know that being late can carry big consequences, for example, being late to court for an oral argument, arriving late for a wedding, or missing a flight. There is benefit and utility to being on time.

Being timely can also be understood in another way, beyond mere attention to minutes and hours. Let me explain by a story.

Never Too Late to Be on Time

My friend, Bettsy, enrolled in graduate school in her 60’s. On her 70th birthday week-end, she received her Ph.D. with distinction from the University of Pennsylvania. After that, she continued teaching for many years at a local community college. Another friend, Elaine, did much the same.

Neither Bettsy nor Elaine believed it was too late for them to begin their Ph.D. studies, even in their 60’s. Each of them knew what they wanted to do and began.

Mid-life challenges are many and varied. Some challenges are physical, for example, starting a new sport or outdoor activity. It was so for me, as I started the practice of the martial art of Aikido in my mid-60’s and kayaking in my late 60’s. I have friends in their 70’s who started swim lessons, others who started to play the piano, while others began a yoga practice. The challenge can also be a change in career. It was so for me in my mid-50’s, when I left a large law firm to start my own coaching and consulting practice. Friends of mine have likewise changed careers. Each of us found that it was not too late to do so. Each of us faced challenges and occasional disappointments. Yet, our life journeys are the richer for the paths we chose to take. I’d do it again.

A question for you: “Is there an initiative you’d like to take, a challenge you’d like to accept, or a contribution you’d like to make?” If so, are you covered by a concern that it’s too late for you – that you’re too old – that it would be impractical. If this sounds familiar, I encourage



you to talk to someone who can be your committed listener, serving as a resource and wise guide, spotting opportunity and potential ambush along the way. Such a person might be a life partner, trusted friend, psychologist, or coach. You'll find it's invaluable to have another pair of eyes on the road ahead.

I believe it's not too late to be on time, to step into what you want and need to do. On the other hand, I also don't believe that it's too early for someone younger to be on time, to step up to a challenge early in life.

Never Too Early to Be on Time

You likely know young people who have taken on big challenges early in life.

Some challenges are freely chosen. Some of us recall President Kennedy's call to public service and President Johnson's war on poverty. In response, many chose a career of public service. Today, global warming and the plight of refugees galvanize many to action, including many young people.

Some challenges are not invited at all. Early in life, some are stricken by hardship, abuse, disease, accident, the divorce of parents or the death of a loved one. In response, we observe that many become "wiser than their years". Although young, they have the capacity and wisdom to know who they are and where they stand. We best not dismiss them, thinking them too young to be so wise. For them, it is not too early to be wise.

From where I stand, the challenge is to practice being punctual each day for the needs and benefits of doing so. At the same time, the challenge is not to succumb to an all-too-common point of view of somehow being too young or too old, of it being too early or too late, to do what is next for you. In her poem, *The Journey*, Mary Oliver describes the journey of many of us: "One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began... It was already late enough..."