



**NOT SO
FAST**

Slowing down and other things to mention in this shorter dek. Probably one more line going here.

Push notifications, pinging smartphones, p-p-p-pressing deadlines. If you think it's time to slow down, you're not the only one.

BY DAVID HOCHMAN

ILLUSTRATION BY
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It wasn't one thing in particular that made me take up slowness for a month.

IT WAS AN avalanche of things: the cellphone that never stopped beeping, the friends I saw only on Facebook, the daily pentathlon from our son's school to keyboard lesson to play rehearsal to fast food place to bed. Whatever happened to undivided attention? Staying and chatting? Or, better yet, doing nothing? The numbed-out hare in me really wanted to play tortoise a while.

Scrambling around the house one afternoon, I knew it was time. I was slammed with deadlines and running to get to an appointment when,

in short order, I tripped over my computer cord, snapped at my wife, Ruth, for losing the car keys (they were in my pocket, naturally), and argued with our plumber for charging \$75 for a repair I could have done for \$5—if only I'd had the time. It wasn't until our 8-year-old, Sebastian, appeared at my side with a shoebox rattling with birthday money ("I can pay, daddy," he said gravely) that I realized I was being a stressed-out jerk. I apologized, paid in full, and vowed on the spot to ease up on my go-go-go-go-go approach to life.

Somewhere beyond the bottomless to-do list in my head was a soft-focus visual of the sort of experience I was craving. Rosy-cheeked from an exhilarating stroll, I sat down at a long table with friends and loved ones, clinking glasses as course after farm-fresh course arrived to jubilant "aaahs." And this was just lunch. Unfortunately, the message today is to speed up or get steamrolled. Taking the afternoon off to play Scrabble with the family? Try explaining that to the boss.

I couldn't afford to ditch the rat race, but what about making more time to enjoy the cheese? Ruth and I discussed adding meditation to our morning routine, and maybe tai chi, and perhaps walking places instead of driving. I tensed up just thinking about all that planning. Instead, we decided to put the brakes on everything for a while. For 30 days—a month I dubbed "Slowvember"—we would focus on doing things well rather than fast, on making human connections instead of electronic ones, and on getting more out of life

by doing much, much less. In all our endeavors, the Hochman family would abide by the following S-L-O-W principles:

S was for "Savor," the idea being to truly appreciate the passing hours and minutes rather than just counting them. Instead of freaking out when Sebastian splashed water all over the bathroom floor that first night, I imagined myself looking back on the scene 10 years in the future. It's a trick social scientists call "reframing," and it instantly made Sebastian's drippy bubble-bath beard not just entertaining but heart-achingly poignant.

L was "Listen to your inner clock." In a world of fast talkers, fast drivers, and fast tempers, it's essential to maintain your own ideal speed. Some moments demand quick action and thinking. Most don't. When I caught my mind racing or my foot pushing too hard on the gas pedal, I slowed myself by silently reciting the alphabet backward. Ruth began taking a one-thing-at-a-time approach instead of making dinner and watching TV and talking on the phone and checking Sebastian's homework at the same time.

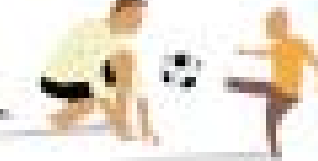
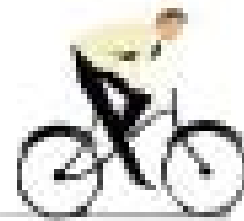
O—"Others before technology"—became my personal Mount Everest. No texting under the dinner table, no checking email at night or before breakfast, no TV when we could be talking, and, horror of horrors, no Facebook or Twitter, *period*. Those time sucks were draining more precious time than I cared to admit, and toggling between real-life tasks and silly updates was causing productivity losses economists refer to as "switching

costs." Many of us are losing, apparently. During May 2011, Americans spent a combined total of 53.5 billion minutes on Facebook alone, according to Nielsen. The key word here being "alone."

W was the ultimate test of every activity and experience: "Will it matter a year from now?" This not only made me feel better about little annoyances ("Have a nice day, Mr. Telemarketer!"), and bigger ones, like when my hard drive crashed during week two. It also helped sharpen decision-making. My father suffers from Parkinson's disease, a type of slowness he never would have elected. When he pointed to a newspaper ad one day for a visiting Cirque du Soleil show and said, "It'd be nice to see this with you and Sebastian," my quick reaction was, "Oh, boy, this is going to be complicated and expensive with an 8-year-old and a wheelchair in tow." My slower, wiser conclusion as I picked up the phone to order tickets: "Of course this will matter a year from now."

AS PEOPLE CAUGHT wind of our experiment, reactions ranged from bug-eyed, take-me-with-you envy to biting contempt. "Yeah, I'd slow down, too, if I could afford it," one friend sniffed, even after I explained that my work had become more efficient with fewer distractions. Plus, we were saving money by cooking at home more, eating from our garden, and playing board games or reading library books on nights we might have gone to the movies.

LIVING SLOW, FAMILY STYLE



DECIDING TO BE DONE

In home life, there's never a time when everything gets done. It's up to us to make that conscious decision. "One more load of laundry won't matter," Noll says. "Emptying the dishwasher can wait. It's OK to let things sit sometimes and say, 'I'm finished for the moment.'" If you can't bear looking at all that needs tending, turn your back to the kitchen sink. Go for a walk. Enjoy being. "The dishes will wait."

MAKING EYE CONTACT

The simple act of a gentle touch or making eye contact can have huge positive impact on your connections within your family. "When you go through the course of a regular day, everyone's so busy you sometimes don't even look at each other," says Noll. Just taking that few extra seconds to stand face to face or talk about homework, perhaps with a hand on your little one's shoulder, "creates a moment that's too important to neglect."

GO OUTSIDE AND PLAY

"A little fresh air and time outside pulls you away from the many distractions inside," Noll says. In a yard, park or other big open space, "there's more tolerance for noise and loud voices, and you tend to feel a little more present. Lead the way with your actions. Go outside, and your kids are bound to follow."

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

Noll and her children regularly stop to ask this most basic question, which so often is overlooked. "What do you need?" contains so much information," she says. "A kid might be freaking out about a sibling taking apart a beloved Lego, but 'What do you need?' gets to the bottom of it. The answer might be unexpected: 'I need someone to play with me.' 'I need a little time to myself.' It increases the chances for good communication."

SPEND NOTHING DAY

For 24 hours, give yourself permission to not consume. Stated as a family mission, it brings to mind how buying dominates our life. "Throughout the day, it's coffee here, toothpaste there, gasoline. A conscious group effort to not consume is freeing. What's surprising is we spend when we don't need to. When we say we're out of groceries we can usually still go for days eating through the pantry."

SLOW SPORTS

Like lots of moms, Noll loved the idea of keeping the family active but didn't relish dragging the kids to practice four times a week at three locations. Her solution: "With eight other families, we created a weekly game of soccer," she says. "Little kids play with big kids, big kids play with adults. There's no separation based on age or ability. It's a great example of modeling the skills you want your children to learn and getting people together."

It wasn't long before we worked our way into a Slow frenzy. I was baking bread before work, memorizing poems during writing breaks, unsubscribing myself from useless email lists, and riding bikes places with Sebastian instead of taking the car. Ruth discovered hidden talents at a local pottery studio that had inexpensive Saturday classes, and I

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became a sensei of laundry—folding every sock, towel, and T-shirt like origami. I took up lawn bowling with octogenarians at a neigh-

borhood park and even found a guy down the street willing to share honey from his backyard beehives. Once again, it was Sebastian who cooled me down with some choice words. “Daddy, aren't we supposed to be *less* busy during Slowvember?”

A few weeks in, I called Carl Honoré, the grand poobah of Slow. His recently released book, *The Slow Fix*, cries “Whoa!” in a world that hurries us along with *everything*: cooking, learning, dating, exercise, decision-making, work, healthcare, parenting, sex. As a society, we've gotten so used to right-this-instant, it's hard to downshift. “One of the ironies is we're impatient about how we slow down,” Honoré told me. “People say ‘My life's too fast,’ so they sign up for yoga, run across the road for meditation, and expect to have the inner calm of the Dalai Lama by Saturday afternoon. That's not the way it works.” His advice, which feels more relevant than ever right now: Do things well rather than fast so you can enjoy life more.

One of the surprising joys of the month was simply saying no. My tendency has always been to give over to every invitation, assignment, and request for help or advice that comes my way. Saying no makes me feel guilty and rude, and I never want to miss out on opportunities. But by turning down an assignment that would have had me working both days one weekend and saying no to two events that required fighting Los Angeles's brutal rush-hour traffic, I got to do, well, whatever I wanted. In one case, that meant

spending who-knows-how-long listening to wind rustle through the leaves outside our house. Letting myself truly do “nothing” felt like a tremendous relief. Imagine the freedom of not having to be anywhere or do anything or be accountable to anyone. Well, you don't have to imagine it. Try it for a few minutes right now and see how wonderful it feels.

It was different (better, frankly) giving ourselves permission to really talk to people, to listen deeply to a favorite song, to *not* get annoyed when the woman in front of us at the grocery store needed a price check and took a while looking for exact change. Is life really going to fall apart if you're five minutes late?

Sometimes, slow was nothing more than taking a leap of faith, like when we jumped headlong into what's become known as Slow Parenting. The idea there is to ease off on overprotective, hypercontrolling tendencies and just let kids be kids, encouraging them to unplug their Nintendos, play outside, and explore the world—get ready—all by themselves.

One morning, Ruth and I left Sebastian home alone for the first time ever (with his giddy approval, I should note) and called him when we got to our neighborhood diner. We then invited him to join us, which meant him closing up the house, putting on his helmet, and riding his bicycle several city blocks to meet us. I'm not sure I had ever heard him sound so grown up and poised as he hung up the phone with a self-assured, “I'm ready for my challenge!” Ten minutes later (sweaty and seemingly endless ones for me, though I didn't tell him that), Sebastian burst through the diner doors, triumphant as if he'd won the Tour de France. Ruth and I were just happy and relieved to be breathing again.

I HAD KNOWN ABOUT the Slow Movement, which began in 1986 with a curious protest outside a new McDonald's in Rome. Italian journalist Carlo Petrini was appalled to see golden arches going up in the heart of a city known for slow pleasures at the dining table, so he staged a five-hour pasta meal with supporters outside the restaurant.

Petrini's legacy lives on today as the Slow Food movement, a network of 100,000 members savoring meals in 153 countries. With my own vision of a slow dinner still simmering, I invited a group of family friends to meet at our local farmers' market one Sunday afternoon. It sounds obvious, but buying direct from a farmer creates a link between the food we

eat, the land it comes from, and who's growing it. The food also tastes fresher and is better for you.

A dozen of us returned to our house to chop and whisk, bake and braise, and take our own sweet time preparing what turned out to be the most meaningful meal I've had in ages. We specifically chose fruits and vegetables listed in Slow Food's Ark of Taste,

As the month came to a close, I felt a touch of melancholy. I didn't want to go back to jumping at every text message.

a catalog of more than 200 delicious foods historically linked to a region but now endangered or forgotten. The I'toi onion, for

instance, came to the U.S. with Jesuit missionaries in the 1600s and adds a peppery zing to stews and sauces. My favorite is Radiator Charlie's Mortgage Lifter Tomato, first developed in West Virginia in the 1930s by a radiator repairman who paid off his mortgage selling the sweet strain that survives to this day.

Honoré knew we had mounted the gathering and emailed in with a toast that went in part, "No one looks back on their life thinking, *I wish I'd spent more time surfing the Internet, watching TV, shopping at the mall, or working at the office.* What really gives life meaning and joy are the simple, slow pleasures. Like cooking and eating together. The future is Slow. Think of yourselves as the crack troops in the Slow revolution."

Soldiers never ate so well. The dinner, which began at 1 p.m., didn't break up until nearly 11, and I can assure you nobody around the table was asking, "How's your Wi-Fi connection?" or "Tweet much?" The glow of laughing and being together lasted days and made me want to take Slowvember one step further. I had heard about Slow Cities, where residents make a conscious effort to chat, stroll, sip, linger, and otherwise ease their way around town rather than just trudge. To get the seal of approval from the international association that oversees designations, a Slow City must meet 61 Slow standards, from having a population of no more than 50,000 to ample bike paths and low noise pollution. It may not surprise you to hear that America's first three designated Slow Cities are all nes-

tled in or near the wine country of Northern California.

We dispatched ourselves to the picture-perfect town of Sonoma, California, for several days near the end of the month. Founded by early Spanish settlers lured by the fertile soil and salubrious climate, Sonoma today thrives with citrus orchards, Christmas tree groves, lavender fields, and farms full of sheep, goats, cows, and fluffy alpacas. It's like walking into a bucolic scene on the label of an olive oil bottle.

People like to talk about "quality of life" in Sonoma, and often that's defined by the smallest displays of kindness and care. Someone, unasked, pulling out a phonebook and calling to see if a favorite coffee place is still open for us (then drawing a map on butcher's paper). Volunteers at the historic town square's movie house beaming as they showed us the beautifully restored lobby. Behind the scenes at the Vella Cheese factory, we watched a happy crew of veteran employees hand-make the company's famed dry monterey jack cheese, the way it's been done since 1931. Sonoma County may have a reputation as one of the richest places in America, but it's also a place where regular hard-working folks can live really well, even on modest means. As Beth Meredith, a Slow Life consultant who lives in the area, told me over breakfast one day, "People around here don't measure things by how much money they're making or what kind of car they drive but by asking, 'How does my life feel?'"

As Slowvember came to a close, I felt a touch of melancholy. For sure, I didn't want to go back to jumping at every text message, push notification, and work request that came chirping. Life is more than the sum total of your emails and Facebook friends. Being with people, being grateful, listening, giving, laughing with the kid and his bubble-bath beard—that's what matters most.

On our final day, I spoke to someone I had been trying to connect with all month. Stewart Brand is best known as the editor of the *Whole Earth Catalog* that famously inspired a generation of idealistic 1960s makers and doers, including the late Apple CEO Steve Jobs. At 75, Brand is currently co-chair of the Long Now Foundation, which encourages a "slower is better" mindset in this age of faster, cheaper, get it done yesterday. The foundation's most noteworthy project is the Clock of the Long Now, a timepiece designed to last 10,000 years. The clock is under construction on property owned by Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos in West Texas.

"When you take the 10,000-year perspective, you instantly realize that personal urgencies and work urgencies and even family urgencies are not the center of every process," Brand said. "Things carried on for years, centuries, and millennia before you, and they'll go on for years, centuries, and millennia after you. That's surprisingly cheerful news, if you ask me. At any minute, the lights may turn out for any one of us, but life itself still goes on and on and on."

That night, a strange and powerful storm blew into town and knocked out the electricity just as we were finishing dinner. Ruth laid out votive candles on baking sheets and she and Sebastian and I giggled through the blackout, using our flashlights as light sabers and making hilarious shadow puppets as we listened wide-eyed to the wind. Life itself goes on and on, but sometimes you get moments like these to savor, when time stands still as if by magic. I suddenly felt it at my marrow: This moment, and all of Slowvember, really, would matter a year from now and maybe even much, much longer than that.

David Hochman's work has appeared in The New York Times, Esquire, and Travel + Leisure.