

Published in the Lakeville Journal, Millerton News and Winsted Journal May 21, 2009

## **Always Running Late?**

*By Brooke Loening*

Think about your friends, relatives, and business associates. Most likely, when you make a date to see them, some are always on time, some are regularly 15 minutes late, others are always late but by varying degrees, and a small handful are early.

Many of my clients have struggled with constantly running late. Today I would like to look at what it means to be late and what might be at work subconsciously that is causing the lateness. With some awareness about what is going on behind the scenes, you might be able to break an old pattern. Without awareness it will be much more difficult make a change as you will be hard pressed to see other options the next time you are getting ready to meet someone or arrive somewhere at a specific time.

So why are certain people always showing up late? There are many reasons I can think of. Basic mismanagement of time is one reason. Thinking you can pack it all in without a realistic timeline backfires for some people. Those people are consistently over scheduling themselves and not taking a realistic look at how their day is going to play out. They are not allowing any margin for error in their scheduling to begin with, which means no time is included for delays and unexpected sidetracks.

Although for many it is a matter of time management, I believe that for some there is more to it. For them, the idea of any extra time to spare, waiting for someone else, or sitting around waiting for anything is a trigger for anxious thoughts. This could include "I don't want to waste any time," or "what would I do with myself during that time," or "I am very uncomfortable with nothing to do in a situation like that." They would rather be late than have those thoughts and the resulting feelings of anxiety. Just the idea of being with themselves with nothing to do is more the problem. Subconsciously, they will orchestrate their schedule so that they are rushed and running late, but with the appearance, even to themselves, of trying to be on time.

For others, showing up late to a date or appointment with someone else is making a statement to them. They might be saying, "My time is more valuable than yours." Most people will deny this, but essentially that could be what they are saying. It is a nonverbal way of communicating that the party you are meeting is not as important as you are and therefore their time is not worth as much as yours. It is ok if they wait, because you in fact are more important and they should be willing to do that for you because of this inequity.

People who have control issues sometimes will show up late as a way to maintain control of a situation, as odd as that may sound. The idea of being on the other end of the equation and waiting for someone else, wondering if and when they will arrive, can lead to the feeling of being out of control and thus result in anxiety. That situation is avoided by being the last one to show up.

Another reason someone may show up late is because they don't want to be there. These people would rather be elsewhere and therefore their resistance may play into their ability to get themselves together to show up on time. Think about it. If you really want to be somewhere and you are looking forward to it, you are likely to be on time.

In some cases, chronic tardiness is a result of low self-esteem. You might say to yourself "I am not that important, and people don't really care if I am there or not so no one will care if I am late." Being late is just your affirmation that your presence is not important to those you are meeting.

So what is really the problem with being late? When I asked a coaching group what feelings they had when they showed up late for something, the overwhelming response was "stressed out" and "feeling guilty". And what is the first thing we do when we show up late? We blame someone or something for our lateness in order to unload the responsibility. When asked what it felt like to be the one waiting, responses included "annoyed" and "they are inconsiderate," and a feeling of disappointment and even resentment were mentioned. So, it really is not working for us or anyone else, is it?

Clearly, showing up late could be disrespectful to those you are meeting. We use the clock to set a schedule for ourselves in order to accomplish the many things we want to get done during the day and it is a universally respected method of coordinating with other people. It is not considerate of the rules we have agreed on and of other people when we are late. We covered this topic in one of our young adults coaching meetings a few years ago and one of the chronically late young ladies mentioned to me afterwards that "it never occurred to me that I was disrespecting someone else when I show up late, that makes me not want to do it anymore."

At the very least, a heads up phone call to alert people that you are going to be late is called for so they can plan accordingly. Some people will call after the meeting time to announce that they will be late, which is fairly obvious by that time. This call should be made as soon as you know you will be late and not after your appointed meeting time, as that is showing a further lack of regard for other peoples time.

So if you are not going to be on time for yourself and your own piece of mind, at least do it for others. You and everyone else will be glad you arrived on time!

An affirmation that might help to break the pattern is "I allow enough time in my schedule to show up on time to meetings and dates with friends, and that way I am less stressed and showing them respect as well."

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