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# The Power of Time

<http://www.mindfulnessstrading.com/power-of-time/>

How would you answer if asked 'What is the power of time in your life?'

We all know what time is. How it passes, how we generally don't seem to have enough of it, and so on.

If you trade financial markets, particularly options, you will know the importance of time in determining the value of your holding.

If you are versed in physics you will likely refer to entropy and Newton's Second Law of Thermodynamics.

If you're interested, here's a very nice piece from Wired magazine called '[What is Time: One Physicist Hunts for the Ultimate Theory](#)'. It's written from the point of view of mainstream physics.

I'm certainly not about to argue against one of the most powerful scientific principles ever. Even if modern ideas from physics and cosmology suggest that the standard theory is not the full story of time as [this introductory article](#) shows.

But this is not what I'm getting at.

## What is time?

Some writers have argued that time does not exist in the way that we currently understand it. As a result, the way we express time is an abstraction.

These arguments have been forwarded by writers approaching the topic from both the scientific angle and from philosophical or spiritual positions.

It's interesting that people starting from very different places should end up with similar answers.

This does not necessarily make them right but it does make these types of arguments more difficult to dismiss.

However, I can't help but feel that this is not really helping.

After all, we all have a strong sense of time even from an early age.

Perhaps I should rephrase the question.

Make it more subjective.

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Forget about time as an external entity. Instead, view it only as something you perceive internally.

And now we are getting closer to how you use and react to time as it passes.

So, what is your perception of time?

## **The Power of Time**

Noted psychologist Philip Zimbardo developed an approach that reflects the focus of mindfulness on the present time.

His approach places people into one of six different categories in terms of how these perceive time.

It's not unusual for researchers, any more than the general public, to put people into neat boxes like this. Sometimes it can even be useful.

Two of these categories are focussed on the past, two on the future and two on the present.

So, this categorisation accepts the idea that there is a continuous temporal aspect to time, at least in how we perceive it.

Zimbardo has produced a very neat animated video called 'The Powers of Time' where he outlines his ideas.

Have a look – it's well worth taking the time (about 10 minutes).

This video won't teach you to trade and it's a bit pessimistic. And he doesn't mention the word mindfulness.

I'm also not totally convinced by his argument concerning the recent impact of digital products.

But it will show the importance of learning to focus your mind on the present, without judgement, in order to create a desirable future.

## **Differing Perceptions of Time**

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The two categories of people who focus on the past are either seeing it as a good time that has passed, or seeing it as a source of regrets or failures.

At different times anyone can fall into one of these categories. But different people may have a dominant inclination to one over the other.

Most people are future orientated. They plan ahead and act in a way that will make the future better according to their own terms of reference.

However, some future oriented people, particularly those for whom formal religion is a genuinely large part of their lives, see this life as only a time of preparation for the real life that begins after death.

People who are focused on the present are split between those who either seek to have a good time - hedonists - and those who simply accept fate and see no point in trying to plan - fatalists.

Personal preferences in this respect tend to be quite distinct and people don't generally move from one category to the other.

## **Understanding Different Time Perspectives**

What is interesting is that there are a number of factors that can greatly influence which of these categories dominates our perceptions of time.

These factors include culture, experiences and even climate.

But, not all categories are equally preferable and we can become imbalanced.

We start life being focused on getting the good things in the present time.

This changes as we are molded through school and we accumulate life experiences, many of which cause negative emotions.

Because we can become imbalanced, an objective of Zimbardo's work has been to develop methodologies to re-balance people's thinking towards the better perceptions of time.

He is certainly not arguing that we should remain focussed simply on immediate gratification. That's too close to addiction.

Some future orientation is required, but acceptance of the present and the need to create that future through present actions is central.

If you are interested in exploring Zimbardo's ideas on the psychology of time there are plenty of [links here](#). Or dive straight in with one of his academic papers [available here](#).