

ABOUT TIME

TRANSCRIPT

1) KAIROS VS CHRONOS

Time has always been something that has fascinated human beings. The passing of time, the measuring of it, the wish to freeze time or the desire to speed it up. We have such a multi-faceted relationship with time across so many different areas of our lives. In fiction, Miss Havisham in Charles Dicken's *Great Expectations*, stopped all the clocks at 8.40am, the moment she receives a telegram from her fiancé explaining that he would not be marrying her. In poetry, we have WH Auden's *Stop All the Clocks*, with the famous line quoted in Notting Hill, as a response to grief so raw he wanted time itself to stop.

Time also has a poignant role in some global tragedies, like in the remains of some pocket watches found on the wreckage of the Titanic, showing they stopped 8 minutes after the ship sank. As a nation, on the 11th hour, on the 11th day of the 11th month we stop and we pause to remember the sacrifices that people have made in wars past and present. When we face tragedies, people come together and take some time a minute or two of silence. It is a mark of respect, of reflection and of unity.

In our day to day life we talk about time in a number of different ways. We literally change time by moving our clocks backwards or forwards in Autumn and in Spring. We often say we are running out of time, checking the time, setting the time, managing the time, calculating the time, trying to find more time. Sometimes we also want to stop time or pass time or make some time. When we are impatient for change we know we have to wait for our time or the *'right time'*. We also project on to the future saying *'I will do that when I have more time'*.

BUT as is often the case in the English language, we use one word for everything. Words like 'love' and 'time' have one word in English but the Greeks had multiple words to explain the nuance of what they were trying to express. Time is no exception. The Greeks had two words to explain time: Kairos and Chronos.

Kairos time describes the time that can open up at any point and is the word used for the concept of the *'right'* or *'perfect time'* for something to happen. It's origins are from Greek archery when the archer found the perfect opening to shoot his arrow and hit the target. But Kairos was also the Greek God of opportunity. It can take the form of pausing, reflecting, recharging, reconnecting with ourselves and with others. It is a time where we are ready for action, the moment feels charged with meaning and significance. In Kairos moments, we are untethered by clocks or calendars, we can get lost in the moment often thinking, *'it doesn't get any better than this'*. It is the perfect time to get clarity, to think of something new, to know what you need.

Chronos is different, this type of time is chronological time, exact time, counting things in days and weeks. Chronos is how we measure our time and our lives quantitatively. This type of time is measured with calendars, clocks and watches. It is the organisation of our schedules, timetables, rotas and our daily routines. It allows us to plan, organise and divide our tasks with precision.

It appears that, from the early Egyptians to the Greeks to humans today, we are obsessed by time but perhaps we haven't always taken the time to understand our real relationship to it. The balancing of both Kairos and Chronos is perhaps what we should be watching more.

APPLICATION

JRR Tolkien said, *"all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us"*. That sounds simple and yet it's incredibly hard. Perhaps deciding what to do with the time we have is harder when you are working in schools. Chronos time is King in schools; we live by timetables and bells, structures and routines, the rise and fall of the term's events whether they are parents' evenings, open evenings, productions or results days. We are good at chronos – we have planners, we colour code, we plan for others and for ourselves, we have our allotted time on an allocated subject and then we move to the next thing on the timetable. There is comfort in this, routine is good and as a community we are all on the same chronos time which makes sense.

But how good are we at Kairos time IN school hours? We may be good at it when we are on holiday and forget what day it is, when time drifts by uninterrupted by the routine. But what about in your day to day life, where are the moments of Kairos there? Those opportune moments where we can sense an opportunity and we go for it or where we can slow down the pace, have a meaningful conversation, be listened to and listen to others, take the time to understand ourselves and others. What about the moments you take for yourself to re-group, re-gain perspective, to breathe? Or taking the time to do things that energise you?

Here is the thing about Kairos time. Our best ideas don't come when we are hurtling through life on too many deadlines. Deep listening or reflection can't happen when we try and fit it into our 5 minutes scheduled gap. Moments of connection don't happen with young people or our colleagues when we don't make the Kairos moments possible. So, what might Kairos moments look like? We do much of it already but perhaps we don't always see how valuable these moments are. Things like going to university open days lower down the school can create moments of ambition and action for those who never had it in their consciousness. Attending school trips, however local, helps create moments and memories and build relationships. Holding regular assemblies and collective events, brings the school together to remember, reflect and re-connect over the joint vision and hopes. Providing the chance for our young people to meet people who help blow apart their stereotypical views and prejudices will help us all in the long term.

We have to literally balance our time – between Kairos and Chronos.

QUESTIONS

The balance of these two types of time is crucial if we want to thrive. So, let me ask you about your relationship with time.

- 1) To really grasp Kairos time, we have to release some of our stress and anxiety around Chronos time. What is one thing you can do today which means you can start controlling your calendar and it does not control you? That could be pencilling in a meeting with yourself, going to a coffee shop, the gym or meeting a friend.
- 2) Knowing when you need to grasp a Kairos moment is important and requires courage and an ability to read the room. How good are you at seizing the moment when one presents itself?
- 3) How do you talk about time? Is that narrative serving you well? What about your team, play back what you have heard in the last week, how much of those conversations were about Kairos and how many about Chronos time?

We need Kairos moments to thrive, to connect with ourselves and others and to build the courage for change. Let's not be so timetabled, that we cannot find time for the things that make life rich.



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