



Going Qukr n Fstr

PATIENT / PATIENT BOOK SHELF



By Del Meyer, MD

FSTR (FASTER) The Acceleration of Just about Everything

by JMS GLCK (James Gleick), Vintage Books, Division of Random House, Inc., New York, © 2000, ISBN:0-679-77548-X, 330 pp, \$14. Random House Audio, Tapes/CDs, 5 hours, \$25.

JAMES GLEICK (www.around.com), author of *Chaos* and *Genius*, takes us on a roller coaster ride from the Directorate of Time glass-paneled vault on the Potomac, where the cesium atoms of the Master Clock vibrate at a goose-stepping pace, authoritatively checking off the seconds. However, this clock consults constantly with 50 others, also located in climate-controlled vaults, via fiberoptic cables. The clocks monitor each other worldwide and are statistically merged at the Bureau International des Poids et Mesures, outside Paris. The result is the *exact* time - by definition, worldwide consensus and decree. A man with a watch knows what time it is. A man with two watches is never sure. Humanity is now a species with one watch, the Master Clock.

Through most of history, a second was fixed by astronomical reference points - the earth spins once and we call it a day. The uncertainty principle of the heavens with the stars' drift and the earth's shivers caused the second, 1/86,400 of a day, to become slightly larger each year. Who would notice?

The particle physicists demanded that a second be a second they could depend upon, as they opened it up and studied it. So in 1955, the atomic clocks were developed. Now we have to add a leap second at the end of each year, which is increasing. Time was a gentle deity for Sophocles. These days it cracks the whip.

Gleick asks whether our bodies can tolerate the strain. We suffer anxiety. We suffer stress. In 1959, two California cardiologists, Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman, struck a collective nerve when they claimed personality traits that define impatience and excessive competitiveness go hand in hand with heart disease. They blandly called this Type A. How can I move faster and do more and more things in less and less time?

This was the first declaration of hurry sickness, another Friedman coinage. In the battle against type A, behavior psychologists tried anything and everything - the slow lane, yoga, meditation, visualizations (a place you like to be), awareness (sounds, surf, wind, leaves, babbling brook). Hospitals now feature relaxation channels.

Gleick thinks the Friedman-Rosenman claim has turned out to be both obvious and false. Stress can cause heart disease. But after three decades, research does not indicate that people who change their Type A behavior will lower their risk of heart disease. He feels this research was flawed.

This amusing story about our fast-paced lifestyles is mixed with numerous scientific facts and technological achievements regarding time. For instance, "Americans tell pollsters that their single favorite activity is sex. In terms of enjoyability, they rank sex ahead of sports,

fishing, bar-hopping, hugging and kissing, talking with the family, eating, watching television, going on trips, planning trips, gardening, bathing, shopping, dressing, housework, dishwashing, laundry, visiting the dentist and getting the car repaired.

"Yet, who has time for it? The broadest and most careful modern survey of American sexual behavior, conducted in 1994 by a team from the University of Chicago, suggests that the average time per day devoted to sex is four minutes and a few seconds. That is, on average, one-half hour event per week.

"Not much - even if this four minutes excludes time spent flirting, dancing, ogling, cruising the boulevards, toning up in gyms, toning up in beauty parlors...showering, thinking about sex, reading about sex...looking at erotic magazines, renting videos, dreaming of sex, looking at fashion magazines, cleaning up after sex, coping with the consequences of sex, building towers and obelisks, or otherwise repressing, transferring, and sublimating.

"Thank heaven for quick-release fasteners. Do you find the half-hour figure implausible? Your own sexual time budget is much larger of course - or much smaller."

And that's just the first half page of a chapter in which he explains what happens during a typical 168-hour week.

I also found the CDs enjoyable. His voice is theatrical. Because he sees the world in perspective, he puts life in perspective. The same applies to physicians - it is difficult helping patients without understanding life in the raw. Gleick opens another window for us.

delmeyer@healthcarecom.net

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

Copyright © 2000-2008 Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society - All Right's Reserved