

Are You An Adrenaline Addict by Kelly Wendorf

Adrenaline is Not Power

The other day I was driving home and a text chimed in on my phone. It was one of those really important texts that makes you do stupid things like respond while you are driving. Which I nearly did. Instead, I pulled over, and started letting my fingers fly on the tiny keyboard.

Texts have this way of making you feel like something is really urgent, an emergency of epic proportions. Maybe because of their brevity, combined with their symbolic shorthand, they kick in that genetic conditioning from the old telegraph days: Your mother is dead [stop] Come home from the war immediately [stop].

Before I could finish the text, I realized something interesting. I was actually addicted to that brief moment of relief delivered by responding to that text right away. Like a rat with her proverbial lever, responding to texts and emails releases a tiny yet significant amount of pleasure hormones—emphasis on tiny. So minute after minute, we press that lever to get the pellet, responding to dozens of emails and texts that promise some eternal final resolution—Sisyphus with an iPhone.

I imagined me in a 12-step meeting, all of us smartphone-less, writing appointments down in our Filofaxes, having actual face to face conversations, 'Hi, I'm Kelly, I'm a text addict'.

But here's something else I learned. I get a rush of adrenaline when I can respond to something quick and efficiently. For a moment I feel, just a little, in control of my destiny — world dominance measured out in infinitesimal bits and bytes. I feel, yes (just a little bit) powerful.

But adrenaline is not power. It is, however, a cheap imitation.

I began to watch myself throughout each day, during those moments of choice between a quick-fix option (adrenaline), or a more considered, wisdom-informed alternative (power). I started slowing down, responding less immediately, choosing power over adrenaline. I made some people mad. 'Where were you?' They shouted, 'I just texted you!' Or, 'Why didn't you respond to my email yet?'

But in spite of their sense of abandonment or worry ('I thought you were off in a ditch somewhere!'), I was giving them more of me. Responses that took time were more present, accurate and effective. Some things even resolved themselves without me getting in the middle and making a mess of them. I stuck my foot in it a lot less. I made less mistakes. And I was happier.

Something about our modern culture's framing of time drives this artificial sense of urgency. It sets up the perfect neurochemical setting for the creation of a society of adrenaline addicts.

As technology governs more of our lives, we find ourselves in a widening gap between *chronos* and *kairos*—the ancient Greeks' two words for time. The former refers to chronological or sequential time, and the latter signifies a time lapse, a moment of indeterminate time in which everything happens. While *chronos* is quantitative, *kairos* has a qualitative, permanent nature.

Chronos is a stopwatch. *Kairos* is a compass.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven, Ecclesiastes assures us. In other words, relax, it's taken care of. We don't have to be the guy at the control panel every second of the day. We can pause, we can let the greater mechanism at work handle things.

Kairos, meaning the right or opportune moment (the supreme moment), begs the question—right for whom? Therein lies the key, for the 'rightness' is governed by something more universal than your idea of a deadline. As collateral damage in this age of adrenalin, its disappearance means we lose a kind of divine leverage. *Kairos* allows for something else to do the heavy lifting.

Chronos feeds adrenaline. *Kairos* feeds power.

One of the qualities of successful people is their trust in *kairos*. I have a friend who refuses to have a to-do list, nor practice any kind of time management strategy. I've watched him over the years with curiosity. Remarkably, his time is rarely wasted by email ping pong or phone tag.

Invariably if he needs to tell someone something, he bumps into them right at the perfect moment, or picks up the phone and they are there. He seldom lets artificial emergency govern his actions (much to my frustration at times!). If something is truly urgent, then

yes, he responds. But otherwise, he moves more like his own river. He is calm and easy to be around.

Here's a fun self test (I grabbed from the Internet) to see if you are an adrenalin addict:

1. I drink caffeinated beverages in order to get going and keep going.
2. I eat sugar to calm myself.
3. I over-promise and then rush to finish projects.
4. I arrive at work rushed and already "on".
5. I feel an inner rush or lack of stillness most of the time.
6. I tend to be impatient.
7. I drive over the speed limit, tail gate and get angry in traffic.
8. I tend to run late or arrive just in time.
9. I often have to deal with a problem or hassle in my life.
10. I don't allow reserves of time in the day for things that come up.
11. I love a challenge and pushing through it as hard as I can.
12. It takes me a few days to calm down from surprises or upsetting events.
13. I find it boring or difficult to just relax and hang out.
14. I am at my best when under pressure and deadlines.
15. Sometimes I deliberately set myself up to wait until the last minute.
16. I don't arrive at the airport an hour before my flight.
17. I carry my cell phone even when I don't need it.
18. I unconsciously try the hardest way to get something done.
19. People complain that I'm not there with them, even when I am.
20. I am a driven type person.

Score Key:

15-20 — You are a certified adrenaline addict

11-14 — You probably have an unhealthy level of adrenaline in your body.

6-10 — You may have an adrenaline problem.

0-5 — Bravo! Adrenaline does not have a hold on you.

If, like me, you get high from adrenaline, don't worry (it's just another form of adrenaline). Just take tiny baby steps to befriend kairos again. She's waiting patiently for you. Remember that every second on this earth is a gift, so what do you want to do, or not do, with it? Respond quickly to a text, or pause and exhale and let kairos have her way? Guaranteed, dear Sisyphus, she'll help you keep that stone on the top of that hill.