



6 skills that take time to master but pay off for ever

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A holistic approach can get you further than you think

Image: REUTERS/Tim Wimborne

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Is time your friend or enemy? Do you race against it like a hamster on a wheel or use it to create a more balanced life?

In the lead-up to [TEDWomen 2016](#), where "time" is this year's central theme, we interviewed several previous [TEDxCapeTown speakers](#) – writers, lawyers, psychologists – about what they had learned about time from older and younger generations. We also asked them which of their current skills had taken a significantly long time to learn.

Contrary to what we expected, their priorities had little to do with how to be more productive in the hours of the day. Instead they were

to do with slowing down, channelling kindness and being curious – all of which contribute to a more holistic approach to the world.

So what are their top tips for a more purposeful career?

1. Make time for self-care

Today, your career success is often linked to the number of hours you can devote to achieving your goals. The author Malcolm Gladwell popularized the idea that it takes **10,000 hours of practice** to become a world-class master in your field. But in pursuit of our dreams, we often neglect other areas of our lives.

[Kgomotso Mokoena](#), founder of SpreadLuv, an NGO that offers career guidance to young South Africans, says that while practical guidance is great, it's almost futile without spiritual, mental and emotional guidance.

She believes we should pay more attention to the psychological and emotional well-being of others, and that far from being a “soft” issue, it lies at the root of many modern challenges. By learning to take pain seriously, and carve out time for self-care, we can become healthier and more resilient both in our workplaces and our homes.

2. Stop rushing

One of the greatest skills we can learn from older generations is to be kind to ourselves. [Athambile Masola](#), a high-school teacher, explains that when watching and interacting with older people she is reminded that putting undue pressure on ourselves to reach self-imposed milestones is unhelpful.

According to Pew research, women generally feel more rushed than men, with working mothers hit the hardest hit: 40% of them report that they always feel rushed.

How many moms feel this way?

I always feel rushed

40%



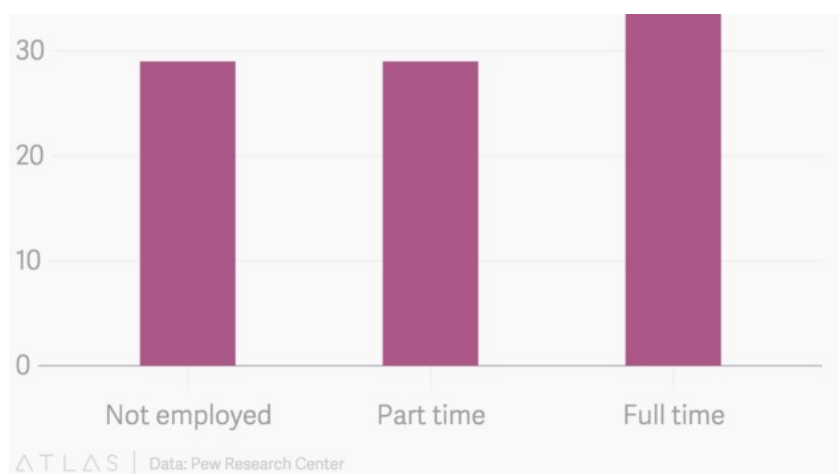


Image: Pew Research Center

In relation to this, we can choose to organize our lives in such a way as to show which things have value. [Rethabile Mashale Sonibare](#), social worker and founder of Thope Foundation, explains that we have the same amount of time in a day, and therefore how we choose to use it “determines how successful we are in achieving our goals”. She suggests apportioning your time between developing yourself, spending time with family and friends, and immersing yourself in work that serves your purpose.

3. Speak up, speak out

There is a tendency – particularly for women – to believe that if they work hard and for long enough they will be sufficiently recognized and rewarded. [Genna Gardini](#), a writer and educator, spent many years trying to make herself invisible in order to “quietly produce interesting work that surprises people”. However, upon reflection, she learned that this only served to make her invisible to herself. She therefore urges: “If you need to speak, speak.” Have boldness and courage to share your work and ideas for the benefit of others, whether that be through provocation, critique or praise.

4. Be curious

Young people around the world are reshaping the systems that we have clung to for decades. Movements such as the Arab Spring, and the more recent decolonization efforts in South Africa, are led by

younger generations demanding the freedoms and rights they have been promised. Gardini reflects on how much she has learned from her students. Watching them insist on an education and grapple with difficult concepts, she feels empowered by their belief that they have every right to question unjust systems.

Fashion designer [Valerie Amani](#), meanwhile, attributes her sense of curiosity to the many questions thrown her way by her nieces. She explains: “As a teenager, I found that to be incredibly annoying because I didn't understand why they wanted to know so much. Looking back I realize the importance of being curious, being alert and not only asking questions, but asking questions until you get a real answer”.

5. Be kind and fair

In a world where discrimination, injustice and pain are part of everyday life, kindness is in constant demand. [Jos Dirkx](#), a media and communications expert who founded Girls and Football SA, believes that channelling kindness and power is one of the greatest skills you can learn, and there are only a few great leaders who are able to do both.

By exercising power with kindness, we encourage respect and tolerance. Clinical psychologist [Nicky Abdinor](#) says: “If we look at any good work in our community, it is always linked to a personal story where we understood a need, could identify with a problem and felt empowered enough to believe that our contribution (no matter how small) could make a difference.”

6. Don't treat suffering as the enemy

We tend to believe there is a quick fix for most things, but the artist [Jennifer Lovemore-Reed](#), another TEDx speaker, believes suffering is not the enemy. In her view, comfort is not the way to truly live, and the culture of instant gratification and materialism that is so easy to fall into at home and in the workplace can cause us to become demotivated and depressed.

Similarly, mistakes are not something to be avoided. Mokoena reflects on how we grow up believing that adults, especially our parents, never make mistakes and can do no wrong. It makes us frightened of being wrong ourselves. We need to have the courage to fail, and to do this we need to master the skills of experimentation and exploration.

You can find more blogs in the [Skills for Your Future series](#) here

Further reading

[The Future of Jobs report 2016](#)

[The Human Capital report 2016](#)

