How often have those words been used? Sometimes they are associated with success, such as being in the right place at the right time. Other times, they are associated with avoiding a danger, such as “If I had been 5 minutes earlier….” How important is timing? If you haven’t read Daniel H. Pink’s new book, you have no idea how important it is.

*When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing* (Pink, 2018) is an absolutely fascinating read. Even before I finished it, I was planning on how to use this in terms of educational planning. Although examples from various aspects of life are included, clearly some that caught my attention had to do with what we should change about working with our colleagues to help them develop professionally. Here are some of the ideas I am taking away:

1. Communication for chief executive officers with investors (think Board) should be conducted earlier in the day. What implications exist for us in terms of meeting with our bosses? Pink points out that our cognitive abilities vary throughout the day, that those variations can be fairly dramatic and that our performance relates to the nature of the task. If we report to a group above us, should we try for a morning meeting?

2. One of the most fascinating finds reported is students in Denmark were taking required tests, and those who took the test in the morning did better than those who took the test in the afternoon. Because this was a computer-based test and the number of computers was fewer than the number of students, some students were forced to test later in the day. In fact, Pink (2018) stated that the results were similar to “having parents with slightly lower incomes or less education—or missing two weeks of a school year” (p. 23). How often do we hold day-long workshops and at the end of the day provide the test (a cognitive task)?

3. No matter whether we are early birds (larks), late ones (owls), or, as Pink (2018) calls them, third birds, we all experience a pattern of a peak period of operation, a trough (where we really could just as easily take a nap), and a recovery. And, as you might suspect, the trough is the dangerous period. Armed with that information, how can we look at our personal schedules to control what we can to maximize our peak performance times?

4. Pink’s book (2018) offers a chart depicting when we should perform certain tasks on the basis of the type of person we are (lark, owl, or third bird). We can’t always control our daily lives; after all, others set meetings we are expected to attend or tell us when access to a room is possible, and so forth. If we can, however, we can select the time of day when we would increase our success chances! The biggest point is that analytic and insight tasks should occur at different times of the day for the various birds. So, do we now have better insight into the seemingly stupified person at a morning meeting when we are trying to make great insights into some issue? Maybe that person is simply an owl trying to cope!

5. Before reading further, answer this question: What is the most important meal of the day? Although I am not a betting person, I would “bet” that most of us said breakfast. Most of us probably grew up with that message drilled into our brains! And yet, that is not the correct answer. I won’t reveal what the research indicates; I’ll let you read the book!

6. Several studies are presented that relate to health care. I know I will not accept an afternoon surgical appointment (unless of course it’s an emergency…then I want you to do it in the next 10 minutes irrespective of time!) and that our most unproductive time of the day is 2:55 PM. Think about the implications for hospitals on 8-hour shifts. At that hour, we are typically doing a change-of-shift report. Aren’t handoffs one of our biggest concerns in addressing safety issues? Can we change the schedules, please?

7. The final thing I will mention is the restorative break. We have read a lot about those during the past several years.
and Pink (2018) summarized those in the following five principles:

- **“Something beats nothing”** (p. 60). A specific suggestion is to take short breaks frequently, rather than saving up for a longer break.
- **“Moving beats stationary”** (p. 61). Pink calls these “microbursts of activity” (p. 61). How many of those do we incorporate in day-long learning activities?
- **“Social beats solo”** (p. 61). Talking with others at work about something other than work reduces stress.
- **“Outside beats inside”** (p. 62). Do we have anything that looks and smells like nature where we can go for a few minutes? Although signs are posted near the entrance or exit doors about no smoking, I find I walk through the immediate area holding my breath because so many people have been deprived of nicotine for a period that they light up immediately upon exiting a hospital (or hotel or restaurant or yes, even when posted signs indicate the smoke free zone extends several feet beyond the doors!).
- **“Fully detached beats semidetached”** (p. 62). Just think for a minute about what you do when you take a break. Pink (2018) pointed out that we often are on our smartphones, texting, sending or replying to e-mails, checking voicemail, or searching on the Internet. We are not completely detached.

If you want to know which meal is the most important, how to take an effective nap, when you should go first and when you should not, why less really is more, when to quit a job, or how to improve the team, well, you will just have to read this book filled with implications for us in our roles and our everyday lives.

A few final thoughts: If you have been told you need to synthesize information, this book is a great model of what synthesis looks like. In all the editorials I have written, I cannot recall one that focused on a solo publication on a topic so important to all of us every day. Every book has some take-away message we can use to improve what we do. This one has so many that you will want to reorganize your schedules! And before you ask, no I have not made all the changes. But now I know a potential rationale for how to make something better. It is really a matter of timing!

### Reference


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