

Overcoming clutter

By Jeff Davidson

Long after the zenith of Greek society, the world continued to admire Greek contributions to literature, the arts, philosophy, and science. To emulate the Greeks was considered to be in good taste. To this day, the Golden age of Greece is revered as one of the most splendid eras in human history.

As with much of history, a great deal is lost or altered over the ages. In the Greek city-state of Sparta, for example, during its heyday in the 5th century B.C., the typical Greek citizen was served by 20 slaves. They rendered their masters all kinds of breathing space, which allowed their masters time to devote to whatever they wanted.

Mercifully, no one today has dominion over others. If you are a head of state, an executive or the parent of three cooperative teenagers, you certainly can delegate much of what you face in order to gain more breathing space for yourself.

If you're like most people, more often than not you have to rely on yourself to get things done — and that's fine, because you can handle it.

You don't have to allow junk mail and too much information to jam your intake valves. The lack of clear priorities and goals, or negative choices need not impede you. You are in control of what enters your environment.

Danger of accommodation

In the world to come, it's conceivable that all people of all nations will live in free and democratic societies. Thereafter, a valid measure of freedom will be the freedom to address the problems confronting our planet and development as a species. We can't get to this higher agenda if great masses of our population continue



Clean up the litter in your personal environment

daily to rake through the morass of the over-information era.

Professor John Kenneth Galbraith studied poverty stricken societies on four different continents over several years. In his book, *The Nature of Mass Poverty*, he concluded that the reason why some societies remain poor century after century is that they accommodate poverty. As difficult as it is for people to live in abject poverty, Galbraith found that they are not willing to accept the difficulty of making a better life for themselves.

Our society appears poised to accommodate clutter on all levels, as if this is the way it's always been and the way it must be. Individually and in unison, our ticket to more breathing space is to refuse to accommodate the overglut.

Individually and collectively, the primary issue before us is attaining a clutter-free society. The larger issues of environmental clutter and the long-term vitality of the earth are directly related. After all, if we can't manage our desks, or the spaces in our homes, how can we pretend to be any more competent in managing the larger environment?

I don't want to be part of a decaying society of individuals who can't manage their own spaces or the spaces that belong to everyone. I don't want to live in a society or a world of time-pressed people who have nothing left to give future generations. My guess is that you don't either.

I choose to live in a society made up of people leading balanced lives with rewarding careers, happy home lives, and enough space to enjoy themselves.

For years to come, the pace of life for much of the world will speed up even more. The future will belong to those nations populated by individuals who steadfastly choose to maintain control of their lives, effectively draw upon their resourcefulness and imagination, and teach others around them to do the same.

Individually and collectively, we need to preserve and expand upon our sense of breathing space, so that we have the energy, creativity, and resolve to meet the challenges that we face, and the greater ones forthcoming. In the words of Edwin Hale:

"I am only one, but I am one.

I cannot do everything, but I can do something.

Just because I cannot do everything,

I will not refuse to do that which I can do."

We need to attain breathing space for ourselves and then to teach others. For the good of all, we need to share new perspectives freely. We owe it to ourselves and to those who come after us.

Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC, helps organizations and individuals overcome the relentless burden of information and communication overload. Visit www.BreathingSpace.com or call 800-735-1994 for more on Jeff's speeches or his books including *Breathing Space: Living & Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-Up Society* and *The Sixty Second Organizer*.