

Unit1

Americans believe no one stands still. If you are not moving ahead, you are falling behind. This attitude **results in** a nation of people committed to researching, experimenting and exploring. Time is one of the two elements that Americans save carefully, the other being labor.

"We are slaves to **nothing but** the clock," it has been said. Time is treated as if it were something almost real. We **budget** it, save it, waste it, steal it, kill it, cut it, **account for** it; we also **charge for** it. It is a precious resource. Many people have a rather **acute** sense of the shortness of each lifetime. Once the **sands** have run out of a person's **hourglass**, they cannot be **replaced**. We want every minute to count.

A **foreigner's** first impression of the U.S. is likely to be that everyone is **in a rush** -- often **under pressure**. City people always appear to be hurrying to get where they are going, **restlessly** seeking attention in a store, or **elbowing** others as they try to complete their shopping. Racing through daytime meals is part of the pace

of life in this country. Working time is considered precious. Others in public eating-places are waiting for you to finish so they, too, can be served and get back to work within the time allowed. You also find drivers will be abrupt and people will push past you. You will miss smiles, brief conversations, and small exchanges with strangers. Don't take it personally. This is because people value time highly, and they resent someone else "wasting" it beyond a certain appropriate point.

Many new arrivals to the States will miss the opening exchanges of a business call, for example. They will miss the ritual interaction that goes with a welcoming cup of tea or coffee that may be a convention in their own country. They may miss leisurely business chats in a restaurant or coffee house. Normally, Americans do not assess their visitors in such relaxed surroundings over extended small talk; much less do they take them out for dinner, or for around on the golf course while they develop a sense of trust. Since we generally assess and probe professionally rather than socially, we start talking business very quickly. Time is, therefore,

always **ticking** in our inner ear.

Consequently, we **work** hard **at** the task of **saving** time. We produce a steady flow of **labor-saving devices**; we communicate rapidly through **faxes**, phone calls or **emails** rather than through personal contacts, which though pleasant, take longer -- especially given our traffic-filled streets. We, therefore, **save** most personal visiting **for** after-work hours or for social weekend gatherings.

To us the impersonality of **electronic** communication has little or no relation to the **significance** of the matter **at hand**. In some countries no major business is **conducted** without eye contact, requiring face-to-face conversation. In America, too, a final agreement will normally be signed **in person**. However, people are meeting **increasingly** on television screens, conducting " **teleconferences** " to settle problems not only in this country but also -- by **satellite** -- internationally.

The U. S. is definitely a telephone country. Almost everyone uses the telephone to conduct business, to chat with friends, to make or break social appointments, to say "Thank you," to shop and to **obtain** all kinds of

information. Telephones save the feet and endless amounts of time. This is **due** partly **to** the fact that the telephone service is **superb** here, **whereas** the postal service is less efficient.

Some new arrivals will come from cultures where it is considered impolite to work too quickly. Unless a certain amount of time is allowed to **elapse**, it seems in their eyes as if the task being considered **were** insignificant, not **worthy of** proper respect. Assignments are, consequently, felt to be given added weight by the passage of time. In the U. S., however, it is taken as a sign of **skillfulness** or being **competent** to solve a problem, or **fulfill** a job successfully, with speed. Usually, the more important a task is, the more capital, energy, and attention will be poured into it in order to "get it moving."

Unit2

Learning the Olympic Standard for Love

Nikolai Petrovich Anikin was not half as intimidating as I had imagine dhewouldbe.
No, this surely was not the ex-Soviet coach my father had shipped me out to

meet.

But Nikolai he was, Petrovich and all. He invited me inside and sat down on the couch, patting the blanket next to him to get me to sit next to him. I was so nervous in his presence.

"You are young," he began in his Russian-style English. "If you like to try for Olympic Games, I guess you will be able to do this. Nagano Olympics too soon for you, but for 2002

in Salt Lake City, you could be ready."

"Yes, why not?" he replied to the shocked look on my face.

I was a promising

amateur skier, but by no means the top skier in the country. "Of course, there will be many hard training sessions, and you will cry, but you will improve."

To be sure, there were countless training sessions full of pain and more than a few tears, but in the five years that followed

I could always count on being encouraged by Nikolai's amusing stories and sense of humor.

"My friends, they go in the movies, they go in the dance, they go out with girls," he would start. "But I," he would continue, lowering his voice, "I am practice, practice, practice in

the stadium. And by the next year, I had cut 1-1/2 minutes off my time in the 15-kilometer race!

"My friends asked me, 'Nikolai, how did you do it?' And I replied, 'You go in the movies, you go in the dance, you go out with girls, but I am practice, practice, practice.'"

Here the story usually ended, but on one occasion, which we later learned was his 25th wedding anniversary, he stood proudly in a worn woolen sweater and smiled and whispered, "And I tell you, I am 26 years old before I ever kiss a girl! She was the woman I later marry."

Romantic and otherwise, Nikolai knew love.

His consistent good humor, quiet gratitude, perceptivity, and sincerity set an Olympic standard for love that I continue to reach for, even though my skiing days are over. Still, he never babied me.

One February day I had a massive headache and felt quite fatigued. I came upon him in a clearing, and after approximately 15 minutes of striding into the cold breeze over the white powder to catch him, I fussed, "Oh, Nikolai, I feel like I am going to die."

"When you are a hundred years old, everybody dies," he said, indifferent to my pain.

"But now," he continued firmly. "Now must be ski, ski, ski." And, on skis, I did what he said.

On other matters, though, I was rebellious.

Once, he packed 10 of us into a Finnish bachelor's tiny home for a low-budget ski camp.

We awoke

the first morning to find Nikolai making breakfast and then made quick work with our spoons

while sitting on makeshift chairs around a tiny card table.

When we were finished, Nikolai

stacked the sticky bowls in front of my sole female teammate and me, asserting, "Now, girls do dishes!"

I threw my napkin on the floor and swore at him, "Ask the damn boys! This is unfair."

He never asked this of me again, nor did he take much notice of my outburst. He saved his passion for skiing.

When coaching, he would sing out his instructions keeping rhythm with our stride: "Yes, yes, one-two-three, one-two-three." A dear lady friend of my grandfather, after viewing a copy of a video of me training with Nikolai, asked, "Does he also teach dance?"

In training, I worked without rest to correct mistakes that Nikolai pointed out and I asked after each pass if it was better.

"Yes, it's OK. But the faster knee down, the better." "But is it fast enough?" I'd persist. Finally he would frown and say, "Billion times you make motion—then be perfect," reminding me in an I've-told-you-a-billion-times tone, "You must be patient." Nikolai's patience and my hard work earned me a fourth-place national ranking heading into the pre-Olympic season, but then I missed the cut for the 2002 Olympics.

Last summer, I returned to visit Nikolai. He made me tea... and did the dishes! We talked while sitting on his couch.

Missing the Olympic Team the previous year had made me pause and reflect on what I had gained—not the least of which was a quiet, indissoluble bond with a short man in a tropical shirt.

Nikolai taught me to have the courage, heart, and discipline to persist, even if it takes a billion tries.

He taught me to be thankful in advance for a century of life on earth, and to remind myself every day that despite the challenges at hand, "Now must be love, love, love."

Marriage Across the Nations

Gail and I imagined a quiet wedding. During our two years together we had experienced the usual ups and downs of a couple learning to know, understand, and respect each other. But through it all we had honestly confronted the weaknesses and strengths of each other's characters.

Our racial and cultural differences enhanced our relationship and taught us a great deal about tolerance, compromise, and being open with each other. Gail sometimes wondered why I and other blacks were so involved with the racial issue, and I was surprised that she seemed to forget the subtler forms of racial hatred in American society.

Gail and I had no illusions about what the future held for us as a married, mixed couple in America. The continual source of our strength was our mutual trust and respect.

We wanted to avoid the mistake made by many couples of marrying for the wrong reasons, and only finding out ten,

twenty, or thirty years later that they were incompatible, that they hardly took the time to know each other, that they overlooked serious personality conflicts in the expectation that marriage was an automatic way to make everything work out right. That point was emphasized by the fact that Gail's parents, after thirty-five years of marriage, were going through a bitter and painful divorce, which had destroyed Gail and for a time had a negative effect on our budding relationship.

When Gail spread the news of our wedding plans to her family she met with some resistance. Her mother, Deborah, all along had been supportive of our relationship, and even joked about when we were going to get married so she could have grandchildren. Instead of congratulations upon hearing our news, Deborah counseled Gail to be really sure she was doing the right thing.

"So it was all right for me to date him, but it's wrong for me to marry him. Is his color the problem, Mom?" Gail subsequently told me she had asked her mother.

"To start with I must admit that at first I harbored reservations about a mixed marriage, prejudices you might even call them. But when I met Mark I found him a

charming and intelligent young guy. Any mother would be proud to have him for a son-in-law. So, color has nothing to do with it. Yes, my friends talk. Some even express shock at what you're doing. But they live in a different world. So you see, Mark's color is not the problem. My biggest worry is that you may be marrying Mark for the same wrong reasons that I married your father. When we met I saw him as my beloved, intelligent, charming, and caring. It was all so new, all so exciting, and we both thought, on the surface at least, that ours was an ideal marriage with every indication that it would last forever. I realized only later that I didn't know my beloved, your father, very well when we married."

"But Mark and I have been together more than two years," Gail railed. "We've been through so much together. We've seen each other at our worst many times. I'm sure that time will only confirm what we feel deeply about each other."

"You may be right. But I still think that waiting won't hurt. You're only twenty-five."

Gail's father, David, whom I had not yet met personally, approached our decision with a father-knows-best attitude. He basically asked the same questions as Gail's mother: "Why the haste? Who is this Mark? What's his citizenship

status?" And when he learned of my problems with the Citizenship department, he immediately suspected that I was marrying his daughter in order to remain in the United States.

"But Dad, that's harsh," Gail said.

"Then why the rush? Buy time, buy time," he remarked repeatedly.

"Mark has had problems with citizenship before and has always taken care of them himself," Gail defended." In fact, he made it very clear when we were discussing marriage that if I had any doubts about anything, I should not hesitate to cancel our plans."

Her father proceeded to quote statistics showing that mixed couples had higher divorce rates than couples of the same race and gave examples of mixed couples he had counseled who were having marital difficulties.

"Have you thought about the hardships your children would go through?" he asked.

"Dad, are you a racist?"

"No, of course not. But you have to be realistic."

"Maybe our children will have some problems, but whose children don't? But one thing they'll always have: our love

and devotion."

"That's idealistic. People can be very cruel toward children from mixed marriages."

"Dad, we'll worry about that when the time comes. If we had to resolve all doubt before we acted, very little would ever get done."

"Remember, it's never too late to change your mind."

Unit 4

A Test of True Love

Six minutes to six, said the digital clock over the information desk in Grand Central Station. John Blandford, a tall young army officer, focused his eyesight on the clock to note the exact time. In six minutes he would see the woman who had filled a special place in his life for the past thirteen months, a woman he had never seen, yet whose written words had been with him and had given him strength without fail.

Soon after he volunteered for military service, he had received a book from this woman. A letter, which wished him courage and safety, came with

h the book. He discovered that many of his friends, also in the army, had received the identical book from the woman, Hollis Meynell. And while they all got strength from it, and appreciated her support of their cause, John Blandford was the only person to write Ms. Meynell back. On the day of his departure, to a destination overseas where he would fight in the war, he received her reply. Aboard the cargo ship that was taking him into enemy territory, he stood on the deck and read her letter to him again and again. For thirteen months, she had faithfully written to him. When his letters did not arrive, she wrote anyway, without decrease. During the difficult days of war, her letters nourished him and gave him courage. As long as he received letters from her, he felt as though he could survive. After a short time, he believed he loved her, and she loved him. It was as if fate had brought them together.

But when he asked her for a photo, she declined his request. She explained her objection: "If your feelings for me have any reality, any honest basis, what I look like won't matter. Suppose I'm beautiful. I'd always be bothered by the feeling that you loved me for my beauty, and that kind of love would disgust me. Suppose I'm plain. Then I'd always fear you were writing to me only because you were lonely and had no one else. Either way, I would forbid myself from loving you. When you come to New York and you see me, then you can make your decision. Remember, both of us are free to stop or to go on after that—if that's what we choose..."

One minute to six... Blandford's heart leaped.

A young woman was coming toward him, and he felt a connection with her right away. Her figure was long and thin, her spectacular golden hair lay back in curls from her small ears. Her eyes were blue flowers; her lips had a gentle firmness. In her fancy green suit she was like springtime come alive.

He started toward her, entirely forgetting to notice that she wasn't wearing a garose, and as he moved, a small, warm smile formed on her lips. "Going my way, soldier?" she asked.

Uncontrollably, he made one step closer to her. Then he saw Hollis Meynell.

She was standing almost directly behind the girl, a woman well past forty, and a fossil to his young eyes, her hair sporting patches of gray. She was more than fat; her thick legs shook as they moved. But she wore a red rose on her brown coat.

The girl in the green suit was walking quickly away and soon vanished into the fog. Blandford felt as though his heart was being compressed into a small cement ball, so strong was his desire to follow the girl, yet so deep was his longing for the woman whose spirit had truly companioned and brought warmth to his own; and there she stood. Her pale, fat face was gentle and intelligent; he could see that now. Her gray eyes had a warm, kindly look.

Blandford resisted the urge to follow the younger woman, though it was not easy to do so. His fingers held the book she had sent to him before he went off to the war, which was to identify him to Hollis Meynell. This would not be love. However, it would be something precious, something perhaps even less common than love—a friendship for which he had been, and would always be, thankful. He held the book out toward the woman.

"I'm John Blandford, and you—you are Ms. Meynell. I'm so glad you could meet me. May I take you to dinner?" The woman smiled. "I don't know what this is all about, son," she answered. "That young lady in the green suit—the one who just went by—begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said that if you asked me to go out with you, I should tell you that she's waiting for you in that big restaurant near the highway. She said it was some kind of a test."

Unit 5

Weeping for My Smoking Daughter)

My daughter smokes. While she is doing her homework, her feet on the

bench in front of her and her calculator clicking out answers to her geometry problems, I am looking at the half-empty package of Camels tossed carelessly close at hand. I pick them up, take them into the kitchen, where the light is better, and study them--they are filtered, for which I am grateful. My heart feels terrible. I want to weep. In fact, I do weep a little, standing there by the stove holding one of the instruments, so white, so precisely rolled, that could cause my daughter's death. When she smoked Marlboros and Players I hardened myself against feeling so bad; nobody I knew ever smoked these brands.

She doesn't know this, but it was Camels that my father, her grandfather, smoked. But before he smoked cigarettes made by manufacturers--when he was very young and very poor, with glowing eyes--he smoked Prince Albert tobacco in cigarettes he rolled himself. I remember the bright-red tobacco tin, with a picture of Queen Victoria's partner, Prince Albert, dressed in a black dress coat and carrying a cane.

By the late forties and early fifties no one rolled his own anymore (and few women smoked) in my hometown of Eatonton, Georgia. The tobacco industry, coupled with Hollywood movies in which both male and female heroes smoked like chimneys,

completely won over people like my father, who were hopelessly hooked by cigarettes. He never looked as fashionable as Prince Albert, though; he continued to look like a poor, overweight, hard working colored man with too large a family, black, with a very white cigarette stuck in his mouth.

I do not remember when he started to cough. Perhaps it was unnoticeable at first, a little coughing in the morning as he lit his first cigarette upon getting out of bed. By the time I was sixteen, my daughter's age, his breath was a wheeze, embarrassing to hear; he could not climb stairs without resting every third or fourth step. It was not unusual for him to cough for an hour.

My father died from "the poor man's friend", pneumonia, one hard winter when his lung illnesses had left him low. I doubt he had much lung left at all, after coughing for so many years. He had so little breath that, during his last years, he was always leaning on something. I remembered once, at a family reunion, when my daughter was two, that my father picked her up for a minute--long enough for me to photograph them--but the effort was obvious. Near the very end of his life, and largely because he had no more lungs, he quit smoking. He gained a

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