

## The Problem of the Lack of Time in Highly Effective Individuals: A Positive Psychotherapeutic Approach



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### Abstract

The article examines the problem of chronic “lack of time” in highly effective people as a psychological and existential symptom reflecting an internal imbalance. Balance model's four main spheres: Body/Health, Work/ Achievement, Relationship, and Meaning/Future/Values. Rather than offering strategies for time management, Nossrat Peseschkian's Positive Psychotherapy posits that time reflects the internal state. Through five therapeutic cases, the author traces different forms of time conflict – guilt, joylessness, dedication, disappointment, and control – and demonstrates how Peseschkian's five-stage model helps restore internal time. The therapeutic process reveals that when a person recognizes the meaning of the pause and attunes to their rhythm, time ceases to be an enemy and becomes a space for living.

**Keywords:** Positive Psychotherapy, Balance Model, time perception, inner rhythm, existential meaning

### Introduction

*"When a person has no time,  
He has, in fact, lost himself in time."*

- Nossrat Peseschkian

The phrase “*I have no time*” sounds like a slogan of modern society. It not only describes busyness but also conceals a deep spiritual crisis: the sense that life is slipping away while one is busy organizing it.

For highly effective, results-oriented individuals, this paradox reaches its extreme – the more achievements they accumulate, the more acutely they experience time constraints. The day is scheduled to the minute, while the inner experience is one of acceleration, anxiety, and constant “catching up.”

Nossrat Peseschkian (1987) views time as a psychological category rather than a mere chronological measure. When a person is in balance, he *has* time – even on a busy day. When balance is disturbed, time is experienced as pressure rather than as space for living. In this sense, the “*lack of time*” is a symptom of an internal discord between the spheres of life:

body, achievement, contact, and meaning. The more energy is invested in results, the more the spheres of closeness and spirituality become depleted.

The problem of time is inseparable from the experience of meaning. Frankl (1946) emphasizes that a person who does not perceive meaning strives to fill the inner void with activity, often without conscious choice. Yalom (1980) adds that the fear of death is often experienced as a “*lack of time*” – an escape from the awareness of finitude.

Positive Psychotherapy offers an alternative path: not to *manage* time, but to understand how we *experience* it. It teaches that time is a mirror of our inner rhythm, and that “*having time*” means being in contact with oneself. (Peseschkian, 1987, 2016b).

This article examines the problem of time constraints through the practice of Positive Psychotherapy with five highly effective clients. Each of them experiences time scarcity differently – as guilt, loneliness, cynicism, a sense of control, or a sense of meaninglessness.

The aim is to demonstrate how Peseschkian's five-stage model and the Balance Model help to restore the sense of *inner time* – the time of meaning, presence, and joy.

## Methodology

This article presents a qualitative, conceptual-clinical analysis grounded in Positive Psychotherapy (Peseschkian). The article integrates theoretical analysis with structured reflection on five anonymized clinical cases drawn from the author's psychotherapeutic practice. The methodological framework is based primarily on Peseschkian's original works, in particular the Balance Model and the Five-Step Model.

To deepen understanding of time as an existential category, selected concepts from existential psychotherapy were integrated, in particular Viktor Frankl's notions of meaning and existential vacuum (Frankl, 1946) and Irvin Yalom's reflections on time, finitude, and death anxiety (Yalom, 1980).

Other existential approaches were excluded to maintain theoretical coherence.

The clinical cases were selected to illustrate different patterns of temporal conflict in high-performing individuals. The interpretations reflect the author's observations, conceptually presented within the framework of Positive Psychotherapy.

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework: Time as a Psychological Category and the Balance of Life Spheres

In psychotherapeutic practice, the "lack of time" is rarely a mere organizational problem. It expresses a profound experience of internal fragmentation – the sense that a person lives in several directions simultaneously without ever being fully *here*.

Nossrat Peseschkian (1987) conceptualizes time as a dimension of *inner balance* rather than as an external resource. When the personality is in harmony, time is experienced as *flow*, within which there is space for everything that matters. However, when one sphere dominates – especially the sphere of *achievement* – a person loses the sense of presence and "starts living according to a schedule, but not within life itself."

Thus, "I have no time" often means "I have no inner space."

The body becomes tired, relationships superficial, and meaning distant. This is a form of inner migration: one abandons oneself in the name of efficiency.

### 2.2. The Balance of Spheres as Temporal Balance

Peseschkian's model of the four spheres, Body, Achievement, Contact, and Meaning, can also be viewed as four dimensions of time (Table 1).

Table 1. Life Spheres and Their Temporal Dimensions in Positive Psychotherapy

<i>Sphere</i>	<i>Temporal Dimension</i>	<i>Symbolic Question</i>
<i>Body</i>	Present	"What do I feel now?"
<i>Achievement</i>	Future	"What do I have to do?"
<i>Contact</i>	Shared Time	"With whom do I want to be?"
<i>Meaning</i>	Beyond Time	"Why do I live?"

Source: Author's conceptualization, based on Peseschkian's Balance Model (1987, 2016b)

When the sphere of *achievement* occupies all available time, the *present* narrows, while the *future* becomes an endless horizon of obligations. As a result, one loses the sense of life as a process and experiences time as pressure rather than as a *gift*.

In this context, the therapeutic task is not to *organize the client's schedule*, but to *restore his or her inner time* – the capacity to be in synchrony with experience rather than in flight from it.

### 2.3. An Existential Perspective: Time and Meaning

Viktor Frankl (1946) associates the lack of time with the existential vacuum – a state in which one sees no reason to live and therefore tries to fill the emptiness with activity.

"As long as a person does not know why he hurries, he does not stop even when he has arrived," writes Frankl.

Thus, time becomes a substitute for meaning:

The faster one moves, the less one feels alive.

Irvin Yalom (1980) describes this experience as a form of existential escape – the fear of finitude masked by constant activity. Clients who say “I have no time” are often expressing “I am afraid to stop.”

Positive Psychotherapy integrates these existential insights by directing attention toward the meaning of slowing down:

“To stop does not mean to lose time – it means to recover it.”

**2.4. The Five-Stage Model of Peseschkian as a Tool for Restoring Time**

The Five-Stage Model – Observation, Inventory, Situational Encouragement, Verbalization, and Broadening of Goals – can be interpreted as five stages of *inner temporal awareness* (Table 2).

**Table 2. The Five-Stage Model as a Process of Temporal Awareness**

Stage	Temporal Function	Inner Experience
Observation and Detachment	Stopping / Sensing	“I notice that I am rushing.”
Inventory	Awareness	“What makes me rush?”
Situational Encouragement	Re-evaluation	“What is good in this speed?”
Verbalization	Sharing / Insight	“I can put into words what exhausts me.”
Broadening of Goals	New Rhythm	“I choose to live by my own clock.”

Source: Author’s conceptual interpretation, based on Peseschkian’s five-stage model (1987)

In the therapeutic process, *time* gradually transforms from an *external enemy* into an *inner teacher*. Clients begin to experience time as a *possibility for meaning*, not as a punishment for inefficiency.

**2.5. The Role of Parables and Symbols**

Peseschkian (2016b) often employs parables to help clients connect with an alternative sense of time. In parables, time is not linear but circular and symbolic. For example, the story of “*The Gardener Who Hurried His Flowers to Bloom*” illustrates that some processes cannot be accelerated without being destroyed. The parables referenced are either directly cited from Peseschkian or author-adapted for clinical illustration; adaptations are explicitly indicated.

For highly effective individuals, parables function as a therapeutic counterpoint – they slow down thought, awaken patience, and provide time for reflection. Through the symbol, the soul’s rhythm is restored – the *time of contemplation* that modern humanity has lost.

**Time as a Mirror of Balance**

In Positive Psychotherapy, time serves as a diagnostic indicator of balance:

- When a person has time only for *achievement*, he lives in the *future*.
- When he has time only for *contact*, he lives *for or through* others.
- When he has time for *meaning*, he experiences the *present*.

Therapy does not *add* time but transforms the *quality of experience*. It teaches clients to feel that “*time is theirs*” when they are in harmony with themselves.

**Cases: The Five Faces of the Lack of Time**

**Case 1: Male, 50 – The Accelerated Time of Guilt**

A successful entrepreneur, divorced, father of two adult children. The client describes his life as “constant running so I don’t have to think.” He works 12 hours a day and cannot allow himself to rest. He feels guilty that his former partners were unhappy.

**Manifestation of the temporal conflict:** Time as punishment and escape. He cannot stop because stopping would mean facing his pain.

**Interventions:**

- During the *observation* stage, the therapist uses a linguistic image: “Are you running *from* something or *toward* something?”
- The parable “*Two Gardeners*” helps him realize that excessive care can suffocate life, just as care can kill love.

During *verbalization*, he formulates the insight: “*The more I hurry, the more time I lose.*”

**Result:** By the end of therapy, the client begins to experience guilt as part of his human sensitivity rather than as a debt. He restores his connection with his children and introduces “schedule-free Sundays.”

### Case 2: Female, 55 – The Frozen Time of Joylessness

A university lecturer with a long career, living in a stable but emotionally poor marriage. She shares: “Time passes, but inside me it is empty and hollow – there is nothing.” She feels apathy and a lack of interest, even when she has free time.

**Manifestation of the temporal conflict:** Time as stagnation, loss of vitality. The past is “behind glass”; the future holds no attraction.

#### Interventions:

- During *observation*, she becomes aware that her *schedule is full (achievement)*, but her *heart is empty (contact)*.
- In *inventory*, the focus shifts to when she forgot joy, from whom she learned to neglect it, and how she brought that pattern into the present.
- The parable “*The Empty Jug*” evokes an insight: “*I keep pouring into others, but I’ve been empty for a long time.*”
- During *goal expansion*, she formulates: “*I want to feel time with my body, not only measure it.*”

**Result:** She regains interest in life, begins painting and traveling alone. She says, “*I have the same time, but now time has me too.*”

### Case 3: Female, 60 – The Taken Time of the Devoted

A mother and wife who has spent her life serving others. She often says, “I have no time for myself.” She gives everything, yet feels lonely and unappreciated.

**Manifestation of the temporal conflict:** Time as sacrifice. All her time belongs to others; she herself is absent from her own life.

#### Interventions:

- During *observation*, she recognizes: “*My time is not my own.*”
- The parable “*The Handful of Rice*” illustrates that excessive giving leaves no room for gratitude.
- In *situational encouragement* is emphasized: “*Your desire to help is your love – but your time also deserves love.*”

- Task: dedicate 30 minutes daily as “*personal time*”, without guilt.

**Result:** After several weeks, she reports: “*I’ve started to see myself. The world didn’t collapse when I took a rest.*” She discovers a new rhythm – still helping, but now *present* in her own life.

### Case 4: Male, 53 – The Draining Time of Disillusionment

An entrepreneur who says, “*Life is running out; success isn’t everything.*” He expresses cynicism and fatigue, often commenting that “women are freeloaders” and “people are worthless.”

**Manifestation of the temporal conflict:** Time as enemy. The past is a “mistake,” the future – a “loss of meaning.”

#### Interventions:

- During *observation*, the feeling of “draining time” is explored: what would happen if time were not an enemy but a teacher?
- *Situational encouragement:* The parable “*The Man Who Did Not Believe in the Sun*” helps him realize that when one closes the heart, days become dark.
- During *verbalization*, he formulates: “*Time does not take from me – I take from myself.*”

**Result:** He begins inviting friends over, cooks dinner for his loved ones, and finds joy in small moments. The phrase “*life is running out*” is rephrased as “*life is flowing.*”

### Case 5: Female, 49 – The Controlled Time of Perfectionism

A business owner and mother of two children. She is convinced that if she is not everywhere, “everything will fall apart.” She lacks trust in others, sleeps 4–5 hours a night, and suffers from insomnia and chronic tension.

**Manifestation of the temporal conflict:** Time as control. She *holds* time instead of *living within* it.

#### Interventions:

- During *observation*, she articulates: “*I don’t live my life – I manage it.*”
- The parable “*The Stone and the River*” illustrates the strength of flexibility.
- In *situational encouragement*, the therapist highlights the positive intention: control is an attempt to ensure safety.

- Task: Delegate one task per week and observe the effect.

**Result:** After several months, she describes a feeling of lightness: *“I learned to breathe between meetings.”*

**Time is no longer an enemy but an ally.**

The parables cited in the following clinical cases are presented according to the author’s professional recollection and interpretative understanding of parables used in Positive Psychotherapy. They are not intended as verbatim quotations from sources.

The five cases delineate five ways in which people can lose their *inner time*, through:

- guilt,
- joylessness,
- devotion,
- disillusionment,
- control.

The common thread among them is the experience of *separation* – between action and presence.

Positive Psychotherapy demonstrates that time cannot be managed but can be *consciously experienced*.

At the moment a person understands the *meaning of the pause*, inner time is restored – and with it, the joy of living.

**Discussion**

Conceptual attribution note: The classification of conflict types, perceptions of time, and therapeutic focus represents an author-developed clinical synthesis within the theoretical framework of Positive Psychotherapy (Peseschkian).

**4.1. Time as a Mirror of Inner Balance**

In all five cases, the “lack of time” manifests as an *external expression of internal imbalance*. Whether the client hurries, freezes, gives, is disappointed, or controls, time has lost its human function: to create space for life.

**Table 3. Types of Inner Conflict and Therapeutic Focus in Time-Related Experience**

Type of Inner Conflict	Perception of Time	Main Therapeutic Focus
<i>Guilt</i>	Time as escape	Experience and forgiveness
<i>Joylessness</i>	Time as stagnation	Revival of sensibility
<i>Devotion</i>	Time as a sacrifice	Establishing personal boundaries
<i>Disappointment</i>	Time as an enemy	Restoration of trust
<i>Control</i>	Time as pressure	Resolving fear of loss

Source: *Author-developed conceptual framework, based on clinical practise and Positive Psychotherapy principles (Peseschkian, 1987; 2016b)*

Positive Psychotherapy suggests that when a client begins to perceive time as an ally rather than an enemy, inner peace is restored.

This occurs not by changing the schedule, but by changing the attitude towards oneself.

**4.2. Mechanisms of change from “I have no time” to “I have a choice.”**

The first step is realising that the lack of time is not an objective fact, but a subjective experience. Exploring what the client consistently prioritizes (work, care, control) reveals personal priorities and unconscious beliefs.

Thus, *“I have no time”* becomes *“I choose not to allocate time,”* thereby restoring authorship and responsibility.

**Experiencing the pause as a therapeutic moment**

For result-oriented clients, a pause often feels threatening. Peseschkian (1987) suggests introducing “positive pauses” – brief moments of silence, breathing, and awareness. When the client learns to “stop” internally, the ability to *experience time becomes possible rather than merely to measure it*.

**Reframing success as an inner rhythm**

Once the initial pressure subsides, the client discovers that true success is linked to rhythm rather than speed. The therapeutic task is to help

one find one's own pace – the tempo at which a person can live fully without losing oneself.

### Symbolic experience of time

Parables and metaphors are key tools – they move the client from linear to symbolic time, in which not everything needs to be “achieved.”

For example, the parable “The Gardener and the Flower” shows that growth time differs from control time.

Psychological Effects of the Therapeutic Process

Applying the Five-Step Model results in:

- Reduction of internal anxiety and bodily tension,
- Increased capacity for enjoyment and gratitude,
- Better work-life balance,
- Enhanced tolerance for uncertainty and uncontrollable processes,
- Experiencing time as a source of meaning rather than a limitation.

As Peseschkian (2016b) writes: “Time is the art of being in your place.” The therapeutic process achieves exactly this – returning the person to their inner place in time.

Practical guidelines for therapists:

1. Use the client's language. If the client thinks in terms of “schedule,” “productivity,” “efficiency,” do not deny it. Gradually shift the conversation towards rhythm, breathing, and inner time.
2. Work with “temporal beliefs.” Explore messages the client has received:
  - “He who stops falls behind.”

- “Time is money.”
  - “Only the weak rest.”
- These beliefs are the root of a chronic lack of time.

3. Integrate bodily practices. Mindful breathing, micro-pauses, and walks help the client experience time through the senses rather than the mind.
4. Introduce “rituals of slowness.” Small daily actions – coffee without a phone, 10 minutes of silence before work, gratitude journaling – create inner time.
5. Encourage meaningful presence. Instead of “managing time,” the client can *sanctify it* – by attending to what is important, beautiful, alive.
6. Work with the paradox of time. The more a person accepts the limitations of time, the more freedom they experience. This is what existential wisdom therapy leads to.

### Conclusion

*“When a person has no time, he has actually lost himself in time.”*

Peseschkian's words summarise the essence of modern man. Positive Psychotherapy does not offer another method of time management, but a path to restoring inner wholeness, from which the feeling of “time is enough” emerges.

For highly effective people, this is a revolutionary shift – from efficiency to presence, from doing to being, from schedule to meaning.

Therapy does not change the clock, but restores the inner rhythm.

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