



CHATTER

“When I said we would take dead aim at the tale of two cities, I meant it.”

**Mayor Bill de Blasio**  
— at his polarizing inauguration.

THE DE BLASIO ERA



**Rev. Fred Lucas**  
SANITATION DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN

“Let the plantation called New York City be the city of God, a city set upon the hill, a light shining in darkness.”



**Harry Belafonte**

“Changing the stop-and-frisk law is . . . only the tip of the iceberg in fixing our deeply Dickensian justice system.”



**Letitia James**  
PUBLIC ADVOCATE

“We decided to work together to basically put on the front page of the New York Times, the face of poverty in the city of New York.”  
— after NY1’s Errol Lewis asked what James had done to address problems at the Auburn homeless shelter where Dasani Coates’ family lived, which was part of James’ Council District. But it turned out James lied and had nothing to do with the story.



Strife in the

fast lane

Silicon Valley psychologist says our addiction to speed in life and work is ruining our lives

by DR. STEPHANIE BROWN

**A** patient arrived late, tossed his cell phone on the sofa and pleaded: “Can you help me control my phone? It’s ruining my life.”

What is supposed to help us is hurting us. What is supposed to free us ends up enslaving us. That’s the para-

dox of addiction. Whatever the lure, it seems so good, so positive, so helpful and so harmless. And then we’re hooked.

So is society. Caught in a chaotic, frenzied spiral of a new addiction, people are chasing money, power, success and a wilder, faster pace of life. Just like any addiction, people are out of control in their behaviors, feelings and think-

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ing, yet they believe they are normal.

This is progress in America. You always move forward and there are no limits to how far you can go or how fast you can get there. Don’t pause, don’t reflect. You win or lose. You’ll fall behind and fail if you stop moving. Fast at any cost is the mantra of a stressed and distressed American society today.

Overscheduling and double-booking have been signs of progress and belonging for two decades. Practices that used to cause embarrassment became proudly rationalized as multi-tasking, a new skill to master. You juggle 10 plates while you brag about your 90-hour week and pop your Ambien to get to sleep.

This is success in America. Progress equals fast, which equals success, a recipe for addiction.

Society is now dominated by beliefs, attitudes and ways of thinking that elevate the values of impulse, instant gratification and loss of control to first line actions and reactions. “I want it now!” or “Do it now!” are valued mantras for today’s with-it person, young or old. Add to instant action the belief that there are no limits to human power, no limits to action, no limits to success. Fueled by the grandiosity and omnipotence of these beliefs, people get high on the emotions of endless possibility with no need to ever stop or slow down.

What are the costs of speed addiction? We live under a weight of demands, real and imagined, that is debilitating. We see an alarming increase in stress-related disorders of all kinds for all ages, beginning with elementary school-age children who are struggling with obesity, depression, anxiety, attention disorders, and all kinds of learning disabilities, a list of problems for all ages.

In a vicious circle, the exhausting fast pace of life promotes overstimulation and overscheduling, which become chronic stressors that lead to behavioral, mood, and attention disorders. We cannot see that we are causing our physical, emotional and behavioral health problems as we try harder to go faster, and then turn to medication to treat the unforeseen consequences. We believe we should be able to go this fast and there is something wrong with us

if we can’t keep up.

We also see changes in our attention and thinking. Technological advances were supposed to free up creative thinking, but the mass of incoming information has actually eroded our attention and our creativity. People have less time to reflect on anything as they become dominated by a need to act, a need to be online, robotically always checking. Multi-tasking stimulates internal chaos and fragmented attention.

It may also interrupt and diminish learning, productivity and even friendships. Switching your attention reduces your efficiency and skill. You can’t concentrate on anything.

So try interrupting your impulsive behavior. Turn off your phone for one hour each day to focus on a book, conversation with your family or friends, or to cook a meal. A small start is your best next step and it counts.

Researchers note that this push for speed is changing the way people think. The need to be efficient and instant leads to a dumbing down of information intake so that people become scanners and “decoders” of information, cruising horizontally across the screen to pick up bytes, rather than delving towards a deeper understanding.

Maybe the biggest cost we’ve encountered already is the harm to human relationships. Instead of enhancing close bonds, technology has facilitated avoidance of direct person-to-person contact, which takes too much time. We maintain the illusion that we’re connected more closely than ever by the number of Facebook “likes” we accumulate. But it’s all fast, now, this instant. Everything is impulse. Our sense of connection exists in the action, not an accumulated, deepening experience.

Baby Boomers know what they’ve lost. The younger generation is growing up with an addictive inner pressure and chronic stress as normal. When they can’t go any faster and they can’t slow down, it will be a hard road to pick up the developmental pieces they’ve missed in our wild rush for progress.

Dr. Stephanie Brown is a Silicon Valley psychologist and the author of “Speed: Facing Our Addiction to Fast and Faster — and Overcoming Our Fear of Slowing Down” (Berkeley), out this week.