

On Living Life In Two-Year Increments

When you're aware of time constraints, each minute becomes more precious.

By [Mark Herrmann](#)

As [regular readers](#) of this column know, I lived in London from 2012 to 2018. (I'm back in Chicago now.)



A few people have asked me what I liked most

about living in London. The truth is, there's plenty to love.

There's the history, and the history, and the history. There's the art, and the food, and the culture. There's the weather.

(Yeah, yeah: It drizzles a lot, but it never goes below freezing or above 90. Compare that to Chicago.) There's the proximity to Europe (for the weekends) and the cheap air fares (to get there). But the best part of living in London for me may have been that I was offered the opportunity to live there for only two years at a time.

Thus, my wife and I were asked to move to London for two

years. We ran around like crazy, because there's an awful lot to do if you'll be living in a place for only two years. At the end of two years, it would be okay to say, "I really need a nap." But it would not be okay to say, "I lived in London for two years, and I blew the opportunity." With each passing day, you could almost feel the sand pouring through the hourglass. We were time-constrained, and we knew it.

The truth, of course, is that we are all time-constrained.

But we don't feel it quite as urgently.

When you don't know the amount of time you've been given, you can waste it. Once you see the finish line, things become more urgent. Time's a wastin': Turn off the TV, get out on the streets, and explore this city.

When you move to New York for the rest of your life, you never bother visiting the Statue of Liberty. You can always do that next week.

When you're shipped to London for two years, you certainly do visit the [Tower of London](#). There may not be a next week.

As the two years were about to expire, my wife and I ran faster: Our opportunity was almost over, and we hadn't yet done everything on our list. Then, the company asked us if we'd like to stay for another two years. Eureka! We accepted, and ran around like crazy for the next two years, because time was

running short. We had only two more years in London.

After four years, same deal. We hadn't yet gotten to the bottom of our list, and the company asked if we'd re-up. So we stayed another two years, for a total of six. And we ran, and we ran, and we ran.

Finally, we learned that our revels were ending; we would be returning to the United States. And so, for those last few weeks, we ran faster still: Stratford-upon-Avon! Let's get out there! Blenheim Palace! If Churchill could grow up there, we could visit. Essaouira! We haven't visited Essaouira! Where the heck is it? Buy a ticket!

Why is it helpful to live life in two-year increments?

Because when you're heading to work in the morning, a million things are eating at you: "razza frazza frazza the traffic," "razza frazza frazza opposing counsel," "[razza](#) frazza frazza the boss," "[razza](#) frazza frazza whatever."

When you're living in a place forever, you let those things bother you.

But when you're living in London for just two years, you're unfazed by the slings and arrows of daily life: "I'm walking down Regents Street heading to Oxford Circus to get on the tube to go to work! And I'm upset because the tube will be too hot and crowded? I must be crazy. I have only these precious

two years in London; why don't I just enjoy them?"

Oddly enough, you do.

When you're aware of time constraints, each minute becomes more precious.

I don't know how you revel in the joy of the moment — mindfulness, maybe? — but it's worth a shot.

Because living life in two-year increments is an uncommon gift that everyone has been given, if only everyone cared to accept it. Maybe it's time to pay attention.

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