

Teasing out a thought sometimes means pulling along any number of odds and ends you didn't know were attached, like tugging a thread on your sweater. Such is the case with plain ol', unpretentious *Patience*. I had no idea it was hooked to so much until I started messing around with the concept.

I thought about *Patience* and gave it a short jerk -- like a test-yank, to see what was attached to what -- and all sorts of things fell off my mental shelf onto the floor of my skull.

I should not have been surprised *Patience* has that much pull. If it is at all true we are here on this Earth, and in this Life to Work on Certain Things, then

Patience

was certainly poured out of the Master Assignment Spigot and handed off to me in its beat-up tin cup. (My Work was probably given out in a very hurried manner, too, so anxious were they to get

Patience

, and me, off the premises as quickly as they possibly could.)

Here's the thing, in a long overview burst: When people are under building pressure and increasing stress, more *Patience* is required, not less. It may seem counter-intuitive, like communication being much more needed by all sides during times of trouble or tension, not less.

If you've ever been salaried, working 80 hours a week, for example, you realize your hourly pay rate's in the toilet, and any free time is like pure gold. *Conundrum*: *At a moment when your time has never felt so valuable, you are being paid less each hour than ever before.*

(Having barely lived through such times, I can tell you that humor pulled me through: I would generally be so rushed that I always felt as if I had to hurry up and relax. This would become my semi-official banner: A calendar and clock rampant, bearing red X's through them, and, in Latin, the phrase, above and below: *I've got no time for patience -- I've got to hurry up and relax!*)

- Working definition for ***Patience***: *tolerant and even-tempered perseverance; the capacity*

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Written by Alex Baer

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for calmly enduring pain, trying situations, etc.

From where I sit, people, in general, have been under increasing pressure since the faux crisis of Y2K. America's place in the world has been slowly slipping and sliding ever since, building up speed on the downhill run, jobs bleeding away off shore. The gloves came off and the financial greed kicked in like lightning-fast kickboxers on speed, fighters who've never heard the rule about not kicking people when they're down.

What began as a barely-perceptible rumble in the distance a bit more than a decade ago, quickly became a loco locomotive on steroids -- one that routinely blasts through our lives, hauling ass whenever and wherever it wants, running wild and without any tracks.

The pressure and stress were cranked higher all the time: a de facto SCOTUS coup for the Presidency slid past. Crony capitalism whiplashed back into place with all its lascivious and lewd leers. The crack in the Liberty Bell widened perceptibly, painfully, on 9/11. There was a war, and then another one, too. Somewhere in there, Republicans and their Wall Street masters nearly succeeded in pulling down the entire banking system and economy -- and would have, had the hapless government not bailed out their casino schemes and covered their losses.

(Hey, who wouldn't want the best of both worlds -- Capitalism on the way up, and Socialism on the way down!) In the midst of unprecedented, record-shattering profits for a select few, the economy contracted a weird, scary kind of lockjaw and gridlock -- traits that would later spread and deepen in Congress, all while the Treasury swooned, bled for far too long by right wing parasites and leeches.

The spiral kept going one way -- straight down, and down still further, foreclosures and financial fiascos coming one right after the other. And now, to today, finally, with things pulled up and leveled off, at the least, but climbing so slowly out of the plentiful and vastly deep Bush-created craters as to make forward motion almost imperceptible.

In boom times, people seem much more relaxed; but, during periodic busts, things get a lot more tense. All the flexibility and play in the system drains out. For some, this is a signal to be stronger; for many others, it is the first step to becoming weaker and more brittle, and more

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easily shattered.

Out of any dozen of years, for example, the last 12 have been difficult by any measure. I suspect it is the same with many people, here in our little 47% corner of the world, where forage is too skimpy on our spotty plains for billionaires to pass through or play.

It's been a difficult-enough ride if you really paid attention and knew why the terrain was shifting and moving underfoot, and where it might go next in the series of earthquakes that just would not stop. For many people, they only knew life was getting worse in America, and lashed out at almost anything that looked like it might support some heavy scapegoating.

By now, I'm a little surprised that lawyers and protective service units don't have us all wearing T-shirts that say, *Warning: Contents Under Pressure -- Stay Back!* Although, one can argue, many of our actions convey the same growling message, just thinly disguised, underneath.

A quote from John Dryden seems indispensable here: *Beware the fury of a patient man*. It seems like this would be the perfect motto for the members of any revolution finally bubbling to the surface. A minor updating and change for the current century, and you've got a snappy T-Shirt, flag, or bumper sticker:
Beware the fury of a patient people.

Meanwhile: There are random opportunities for the curious to check under the national hood when things run roughly, checking the dipstick for diagnostic clues. So far, I'd say we're all down a quart or two of well-refined *Patience*, and are more than topped off with not-so-sweet Crude.

Before you write me off as a dipstick, myself, consider just a couple of the symptoms I've been noticing: People bicker and snipe everywhere, and over utterly meaningless things. Check the comments section on almost any online page, and people are warring back and forth over subjects most of us would find tragically odd and strange.

Whether it's a news or video site, people are jumping down one another's throats, ready to die

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for their opinion over a movie or a blurb about a teevee show or celebrity -- even actual events in the news. I've even seen bared fangs and barbed retorts in comment sections, in people's exchanges, over simple, everyday cartoons at a comics website.

I'm sure you can find your own symptoms in our culture and society that all point to us and our countrymen as being stressed-out, overly-pressured people acting badly. We do not have a shortage of examples in this country. (Need I say "Congress"?)

Here's where we start to tug harder at that loose thread on the national sweater: What else is our lack of patience causing -- individually, collectively?

Political discussions are downright acidic and almost lethal, for one. There are no series of slowly-rising steps of disagreement, and none of the patience needed to come back from the knife's edge. We are instead headed, in mere seconds of a started conversation or exchange, from identification of an alternate opinion directly into do-or-die mode, with no stops in between. *Zero to 100, in one-point-nothing flat.*

And, there are the physical realities in which we now live: The squeeze for goods and services continues as population and competition increase. Getting a job is tougher than ever. So is finding a nice place to live, or a good school for your kids. Drivers in traffic seem blindfolded, unaware of anyone else in their worlds, and all raving mad. A thousand big and little things stretch out and pummel our patience all day, everyday.

These things make me wonder not so much why we are popping our corks so often, and so quickly, but how to slow it or even stop it. That sweater again: Is our lack of patience in this country polarizing us more and more, or was polarization here first, driving away our patience? Is it possible that patience allowed for compromise, after calmly hearing one another out?

(This supposes all parties wish to have a conversation with the same ground rules, such as: *Use facts and stay in the real world.*

It is impossible to converse and compromise with people who have no intention of following the ground rules, or are clueless in general, just as it is impossible to reason with someone who has a sick mind.)

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The more I think about such things, the less certain I become of almost everything I thought I knew. Firesign Theatre has never seemed so correct in stating that *Everything I Know is Wrong*.

And, there is even less I know about what might unravel next while futzing around with that frayed, innocent-looking sweater thread. For all I know, there are times when we use too much patience, when putting one's foot down is more called for. Separating out all those assorted events into their appropriate bins -- Just Right, Not Enough, Too Much -- is for someone with far more patience and wisdom than me.

As uncertain as I remain about much, I am still somehow convinced that solving our individual and communal Patience surpluses and deficits would solve a lot of other problems we had no idea were initially linked. I suspect many answers to our nagging human problems are as hitched to Patience as are scientific inquiry and research.

Making matters weirder, if not actually worse: One either has patience or does not. It strikes me as being a very difficult crop to grow from scratch. It's not like running out of milk or bread and hopping out to any number of places to buy more. How does one "grow" *Patience* -- or *Serenity*, or any other intangible commodity?

Who knows -- maybe it's a lack of *Civility* I've been detecting, the societal grease our parents and grandparents applied to help ease one another through their days, helping to make compromise possible. Or, maybe it's the constant drive for immediate gratification that's the problem -- the notion that we should not wait for sensory bliss, but that it should always flow over us in steady streams, or in raging torrents, if we can arrange it.

Perhaps it's *Reasonableness* that we're fresh out of, privately as well as the public larder goes -- although I suppose it could always be *Reason* or *Sanity* that our pantry is plumb out of.

Whatever it is, or was, we seem to be fresh out of it, right now. Maybe we can import some,

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although I have no idea from what spot on Earth such things might come.

And, as I might have suspected of me, it is right about *here* that I find I have absolutely no more patience for this subject, and will wander off now, in search of powerful headache relief.

Some people get to work on their tans; me, I got stuck with Forbearance. (The built-in problem I'm having is that I find I have very little time or energy I want to devote to working on it.)

This is right about where someone usually says, "Such is life," before tossing off a shrug, then ambling off to get hopelessly entangled once again, just in some other area of existence. *Let the record show this has already been done.*