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Being Late

Late, from the Old English *laet* 'slow, tardy,' means something taking place or done after the expected, proper, or usual time. Certain people are so dependably and predictably behind schedule, it's said that when the time comes, they'll be late to their own funeral.

Funerals aside, being late is generally looked down on. Take a dentist appointment, for example. Think of it as an unwritten contract, a promise that you'll both meet at 2 p.m. to have your teeth cleaned. But, there are too many people asking too much of you, too many things pulling you in too many directions, and too many promises to keep. These are the excuses you'll hear from people who are late.

Every late arrival sends a message to the person waiting that they're less important than you and what you were doing. In their mind, you had a choice to make, and you chose another person or activity. Do it enough and your relationship with that person will suffer. Being late sends a signal that you aren't dependable and not to be trusted.

Being on time takes planning and effort. If you have the reputation for always being late, here are a few dos and don'ts to help get you back on track.

Being Late Dos and Don'ts

- Don't over-commit. Prioritize your commitments if you have more than can be done in the time available. Say "no" to things at the bottom of the list. Not even superman can be two places at one time.
- Count backwards. If your dentist appointment is at 2 p.m. and it will take 30 minutes to get there, add 10 minutes for good measure, and leave at 1:20 p.m., not a minute later.

- Know how to leave. If you're with another person when the time to leave comes, make a graceful exit. Just say, "I'm sorry, I hate to cut you off, but I have an appointment and I need to get going." Most people will respect you for sticking to the schedule.
- Overestimate. Assume everything takes longer than you think. It does, after all. Being a little early is better than being late. You will be calm, collected, and ready to go.
- Stay in touch. If you did everything right and you're still going to be late, call the other person and let them know. It happens.

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