

S.tressed O.ut S.enior
By: Ruby Tozzi

One thing, two thing, red thing, blue thing- what's the harm in one more new thing?

Matthew Dawson is a senior at Mentor High School. He balances a rigorous class load filled with many College Credit Plus and other advanced courses, participation in the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra, leading the Fighting Cardinals Marching Band as one of the four drum majors, time with his close-knit family, Refuge (Mentor High School's Christian club), musical and academic preparations for the college application/audition process, flute lessons, and oboe lessons. Not to mention general chores, hygiene, and food. With a schedule as overwhelming as Dawson's, stress is inevitable. His commitment to the activities that he participates in fuels some of his motivation. But, sometimes a passion for something is not enough to keep the momentum going. In knowing Dawson throughout the years of his childhood until now, I have observed him to be a very focused individual. He is also not the expressive type without being prompted. He sets boundaries, priorities and make schedules easily. Though, as Dawson will tell you, the assumption that he has his life entirely organized and under control is unfounded. Matthew Dawson is one of the smartest people I know. His understanding of incredibly complex concepts is unmatched, and his dedication to giving his absolute best to each of his commitments is beyond impressive, but giving everything your "all" is not without its consequences. To scratch the surface of understanding his load, this is a what a typical Sunday for Dawson looks like:

Sunday:

09:00 Get ready for church in downtown Cleveland, where Dawson sings in the choir and plays a few instruments throughout the service.

10:00 Mass begins and lasts until around 11:00.

11:30 Make up missed activity work from Refuge, a club that meets to work on living a life of faith, involved in God's word; rather than partial commitment through Sunday mass and unattentive prayer.

01:40 Dawson arrives 20 minutes early to the indoor marching band concert call time because he is the FCMB drum major. When he arrives, he organizes the ladders and speakers into the gymnasium in preparation for the performance.

02:00 Dress rehearsal for the indoor concert begins.

03:00 The performance begins and is expected to last for roughly 45 minutes.

03:45 Because of the indoor concert, Dawson was forced to miss his regularly scheduled Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra rehearsal from 1:30-5:30. So after the concert, he rushes to Severance Hall to attempt to participate in the last 45 minutes of the practice.

5:30 Dawson is done for the night and can use the rest of his time as he pleases. He is likely to listen to the "Bible in a Year" podcast, play games with family, do homework, etc.

That feels like a lot of things stuffed into just one afternoon, and to think that this is his easy day.

A typical weekday for Dawson looks very similar. For example, this is a typical Monday:

07:25 Dawson wakes up and begins his day.

08:00 Classes begin, throughout the school day he will attend or work on Modern Physics, Calculus III, Mixed Choir, Symphony Orchestra, Marching Band, Men's Chorus, an online Slovenian course, a lunch period, and a study hall period.

02:30 The school day will end and a Refuge meeting will begin, it lasts about an hour and 15 minutes.

03:45-04:00 Dawson arrives at home and begins working on his Modern Physics, which he identifies as his most challenging course this semester. The FCMB is going to states soon so Dawson is allocating extra time to this course so that he does not fall behind and so that he can focus on his responsibilities in the band.

05:15 He heads to the Cleveland Institute of Music for a chamber ensemble rehearsal.

06:00 CIM rehearsal commences and lasts an hour.

Throughout all of this driving, Dawson commits himself to continuing his *Bible in a Year* podcast.

For many, looking at that much information and having that many tasks at hand is staggering. For a person like Dawson who gives his very best to everything he commits to, each of his activities takes up what some may consider too much time. Dawson, feels differently, “I take on a lot of work, but my busy schedule is usually not a primary cause of stress for me.” On Sunday just last week, nearly all of his interests collided into one day. A day that he tries to keep relatively clear for purposes of preventing burnout; which shows just how resilient he is.

There are many different categories of stress. It would be nearly impossible to exemplify every single type, but there are some extremely common types. Many experience intense emotional sadness when they endure exterior pressures, others find motivation in it. Some become more dependent on others; while their opposites distance themselves and close off social emotional contact until their task at hand has been taken care of. Dawson is one of the latter. He says this about his worry, “I tend to become colder and more dismissive towards others, but I see that more as being focused.” It is almost as if he views stress as a supporter that is helping him to stay centered on his goals.

Based on his own definition of stress, Dawson would not classify his feelings as such. He defines stress as “...the fear (be it rational or irrational) of the possible negative consequences that will arise from inadequate performance in any area of life.” He shares that he does not often label his feelings as stress under this definition, as he does not believe that his challenge is inadequate performance. According to the Miriam Webster dictionary, stress is defined both mentally and physically as strain or pressure. With this definition, Dawson’s arguably over-packed daily schedule begins to look a lot more like stress.

To depict his relationship with planning and how he would exemplify stress in his own life, he says, “As an example, this week I’ve had some days where I worked 14 hours straight,

and that hasn't stressed me out all that much...However, I missed a deadline for reporting my private lessons [and] it was the biggest stressor so far this week because I hadn't planned for it." He is acutely aware of the way that stubbornness in his plans is typically the cause of both his stress as well as his productivity, expressing, "although I've become much better at planning, I'm not infallible, and my inflexibility can be problematic." Being busy and having many tasks at hand for the day are Dawson's specialty. He finds productivity easier on chaotic days, illustrating: "An intense hit of stress is like instant caffeine; the adrenaline rush allows me to ignore how tired I might feel. Additionally, when I have a long day or week with a lot of different commitments, I find procrastination less tempting than when I have a day with only a few tasks to complete." This is something many people, especially academically involved high school students, can relate to. When the day moves from one thing on to the next, the mind shifts gears constantly and doesn't have time to worry about this thing or the next, until burnout strikes that is.

Burnout as defined by Miriam Webster is: "exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration." Again, the life of a committed student--to academics, activities, leadership, family, faith, etc--is by definition the prolonged stress and planning for the next thing. Dawson briefly mentions the idea of experiencing burnout in his response about finding motivation in the stress that he packs onto himself, saying, "However, occasionally I burn out if I keep this pace up for too long." Burnout is a very common thing. Areas in which any person could experience it include: work, school, relationships, interests/activities, faith, romantic relationships, chores/household tasks, or even friends. Dawson seems to have special reference to burnout in the sense of losing the motivation for any of the things that he enjoys when he has found that it prevents him from experiencing

balance and peace: an accumulation of the many factors in his life that influence his mental state. To combat the potential effects of burnout, he says that he likes to keep Sundays “relatively free” so that he may tie some loose ends and “rest up for the week.” Being proactive in knowing his mental limit and preventing himself from reaching that point is very beneficial to Dawson’s success. In all of the activities he participates in, he has always been a fan favorite for his sheer dedication, determination, work ethic, and generally positive attitude; so it is clear that his success throughout the years has been quite abundant.

Matthew Dawson is someone that everyone deserves in their life, even if he does get “cold” during intense times. He won’t cease to encourage those around him and his work ethic is beyond admirable; it is inspiring and a good reminder that we are all human.

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