

Taking Time Away from Work

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You're in business, which is why you might have some trouble accepting what I mentioned earlier on—that you can't be creative if you're constantly working. If you're always working on the old ideas, there won't be any time to generate new ideas. You also can't be creative if you're constantly trying to be creative. This isn't something you can force, because it will have the opposite effect.

It's Really, Really Okay to Take a Break

In today's fast-paced society, it can feel like a waste of time to take breaks. You're expected to work from sun up to sun down, constantly connected to the outside world. You're frazzled, overworked, and overtired. Is it any wonder you're having trouble with creativity?

You're not a machine. Not only is working all the time destroying your productivity, but it also dashes any hope of generating new and innovative ideas. Taking frequent breaks is important, but even that may not be enough. The good news is that there are specific things you can do to recharge your batteries.

The Generation Gap

This book wasn't designed with any particular age group in mind—we're all working in the same world and have many of the same goals. With that said, I find it interesting to explore how ages and stages relate to creativity.

If you're toward the later end of your life, you might be ahead of the game already. You've realized what's important in life and know what

you missed out on when you were younger. You're ready to feel invigorated and show the world what you're made of.

Today's generation works differently than we did, and it's a shame for creative minds. We knew the value of hard work, sure, but we didn't feel obligated to check and respond to work e-mails at all hours of the day and night, because it didn't even exist. Now it's the same for us—we feel like we can't take the opportunity to turn the noise off.

It's easy to envy the younger crowd because they seemingly have more energy to be creative and so much time left in life to implement new ideas. The sad fact is that many of them are going to burn themselves out before they really get started. It's considered a badge of honor in some young professional crowds to work 14-hour days and pull all-nighters to get things done and get ahead. That lifestyle is just not sustainable and it kills the creative mind.

Luckily, when you combine youthful energy with the techniques I'm going to describe, the younger set can be unstoppably creative and innovative. If you're part of that group, I hope you heed my warning—it will actually put you far ahead of your colleagues and competition.

The older set is already primed to take advantage of what I'm going to describe. Don't envy the youth, because you're in a prime position. You know what it means to work hard, and you know what to value in life. You're ready to dive into this with your full heart and mind.

The bottom line for both young and old is-- if you want to be at the peak of productivity and creativity, you absolutely have to take breaks and not work quite as hard all the time.

Working in Increments

A lot of this has to do with how our bodies work. I primed you for this thought earlier by mentioning the research that shows we're often most creative when we're turned off—either morning or night.

Scientists have also discovered that our bodies work best in 90-120 minute increments. We need to take breaks in between before beginning again. Still others recommend even shorter spurts of working, such as 25-30 minutes at a time, with short breaks in between and more extensive breaks every few hours.

To be most productive and creative, these breaks can't be forced upon you. For instance, working from home and being interrupted by your children every 20 minutes doesn't mean you're going to be any more creative or productive. Scientists have discovered that choosing your schedule and taking breaks of your own choosing can lead to increased creativity and productivity. This is compared to those who work straight through, with no breaks at all.

Follow this schedule and watch how your productivity soars. You'll be better rested and have more space in your mind to be creative.

Taking the Time to Relax

Have you ever noticed that you sometimes get your best "eureka" moments of inspiration when you're relaxing? This relates to the old thought that creative people get their best ideas in the shower. For many, a long walk or a steamy shower helps clear the mind and allows for the answers to fall upon you.

Why is that? Why don't the answers always come to you when you're actively trying to find them?

The thing is, creativity is all about making *new* connections. If you're sitting there, staring at a problem with the same set of data, you're never going to come to a new conclusion. Getting away from the problem, and finding new data and sensory information, gives your mind what it needs to be creative-- even when your mind isn't actively looking for the solution.

Part of this has to do with focus. If you're focusing on something intently, you can only focus on a limited set of data. You don't have new information available to you in that moment, even though you're desperately working.

Yes, focus is important, but that has nothing to do with the creative process. Remember—creativity happens as part of a cycle. You need to collect new information to form new ideas.

As Einstein said, "creativity is the residue of time wasted."

Let that sink in for a minute. Einstein, arguably the world's best thinker, said that creativity is the result of wasted time. What does that really mean? It means exactly what you think it does—taking the time to relax, of your own choosing, gives your mind the input it needs. It takes your mind off the problem so you can form incredible connections.

How do you make this work in today's fast-paced world? I suggest you follow the schedule where you work in 25 or 90 minute increments—whatever you find to be most beneficial. Take small breaks in between. Then, after a few hours have passed, give yourself a real break. Take a nap in the middle of the day, take a bubble bath, read a novel you've been dying to read, or watch your favorite TV show.

Practice mindfulness, or being in the present moment, as you do these things. Don't do them because you feel so stressed you can't do anything else. Do them because you want to. Embrace new sensory input, input from others and their experiences, and a relaxed mind—it will help you form new and creative connections.

This isn't just a matter of sticking to your prescribed breaks. Sometimes, you'll just *know* that you need a break. If you're having trouble focusing on a task or coming up with the right idea, listen to yourself. Your mind is telling you that you don't have the available input to keep on going. Go outside and pull weeds in the garden. Go get a coffee from Starbucks.

Take a small break to take you out of your current environment and put you in a new one.

There's also a lot to be said for taking a break to exercise. We all know exercise is important—but many of us let it fall by the wayside because we're so busy with work. This has the opposite intended effect. We become less physically and mentally fit. Cardiovascular exercise can actually help your hippocampus form new neurons. Exercise helps you clear your mind, improve your health, and gives you new fodder for creativity. You'll be healthier and happier than ever before.

Turning Off In the Digital Age

I'm on the computer as much as anyone I know. I also have a lot of the other gadgets we can't seem to live without these days. But, I've found that it's very important to schedule time away from these devices, especially before going to sleep.

Having these devices allows us to work more and always stay connected with colleagues, clients, and customers. But, this comes at the cost of our sanity and creativity. If you're always "on," there's never time to be creative.

These devices are almost like a drug for some people-- we crave them. We feel bad if we don't check our e-mail one last time before bed. We wake up and our first thought is to wonder if there are any new e-mails we have to answer.

I don't have any advice for getting completely away from this, as it's so ingrained in society today. What I can tell you is that you have to schedule time where you absolutely, under no circumstances, turn on one of your devices. Staying connected all the time zaps creativity.

This is especially true if you find yourself working nonstop in the evenings instead of spending time with your family. This is true if you find yourself turning down activities with friends because you feel you have too much

work to do. Think of this selfishly if you need to-- you're dashing your creativity by not spending time with other people and declining invitations around you. It's so important to give yourself experiences that have nothing to do with work if you want to be more creative.

It might be hard at first, so make an extra effort to put fun activities on your calendar. Schedule a date night, start a game night with your kids, sit down to the dinner table with your family every single day, and call an old friend whose invitation you've regularly declined. I promise that as you start to do these things, you'll become happier, more relaxed, more productive, better liked, and much more creative.



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