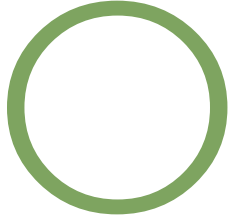




Time to Do Everything But Think

(how doing so makes helps you avoid mistakes & burnout)

By Kelli Richards



ur lives are full and often frenzied – juggling work demands and the many roles and responsibilities we have in our lives. What gets lost is the lost art of pausing to reflect, to think, be creative, and just to be. And the cost of not doing so turns out to be pretty high.

Why It's Key to Take Time to Pause, Reflect & Think -- & Consequences When We Don't

I'll admit that throughout most of my work life (even to the present day), I have a tendency towards being a workaholic if left unchecked. I lean towards over-work with an eye towards checking everything off my impossibly long To Do list in a given day, and ending the day with inbox zero in terms of e-mails. All calls returned, all deliverables addressed, and all e-mails attended to. For many of us, I suspect this is an all too familiar condition. But let's take a look at what gets lost with that approach and how it's harming us.

We need time to balance doing and being for our own well-being and peace of mind. We need time to slow down and reflect on new ways to approach situations and challenges, and to create and ideate new strategies and projects. Time to work ON our businesses vs. IN them. We function much less effectively if we don't do this, and it can cost us lots of time and money (on our own and for companies if we work for others). We can literally be leaving millions on the table if we don't make time to create new products and programs because there's no time to think. Our productivity takes a nose-dive and costs businesses untold millions as a result.

Further we can lose perspective; we're meant to enjoy our work & have fun in our lives. If we tilt the scales too much in one direction for too long, we can become dull, boring and lifeless.

To turn things around, we need to make the commitment to create blocks of time carved out just for these activities – and even to take a break and take a walk away from the computer to stretch, breathe, meditate, take a nap, and refresh ourselves during the day. The consequences if we don't include chronic stress, irritability, anxiety, strained relationships, compromised productivity—and even exhaustion, burnout, and divorce at the extreme end of the spectrum.

Peace Between the Pings: Tips for Making the Time to Think

First of all, you've got to be motivated to want to do this; you've got to embrace that there may be a better way to approach your work week based on everything I've just shared. And you've got to be willing to take control over your time and your approaches to shift the outcomes.

Here are a few things I've found to be helpful:

***Work in sprints** – studies show that we are most productive if we take breaks every 90 minutes to refresh ourselves between tasks. I've definitely found that to be sound advice.

***Structure your schedule** so that you actually make time each day to allow yourself to just be. This could be while working out, reading, meditating or journaling in the morning or during your commute. It could be that you make sure to take a lunch break and not work straight through. If you work from home or work for a progressive company, a short nap can do wonders to refresh you mid-day and restore your productivity.

***Take control of your day** (to the extent you can). Batch your meetings, calls, and tasks if you're able so you can shift gears and find quiet time either between them or at the beginning or end of the day – whenever you're at your highest level of energy and productivity – and build think time in. Literally block out an hour or two on your calendar and ensure you won't be interrupted. Close your door if you have one and make others aware of this sacred time.

***If you work for yourself**, don't work more than six hours a day; balance it out with rest, play, life activities, and precious think time to daydream, problem solve, and create new things.

If you work for an employer, see about working from home one day a week where you don't have to worry about commuting, and don't have constant interruptions. It's a game changer.

***The big one** – move towards taking a weekly sabbatical (!). This is where you work four days a week, and the fifth day you use for "think work", ideation, creation, and to just BE without any scheduled calls or meetings (or minimized/batched). Then you have your weekend time freed up for play, renewal, family and friends, and lifestyle activities that enrich and restore you.

Reap the Benefits

In applying these tips, my hunch is that you'll reduce your stress and increase your productivity, while feeling more relaxed, have more fun and more peace of mind. Reach out if you'd like support and assistance in customizing a solution that can work for your unique circumstances.

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