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Every now and then, I have to get away from my daily routine and let go of my responsibilities and obligations and simply “do nothing.” That’s right, do absolutely nothing. And you should too!

There’s a real difference between slowing down and letting go. Slowing down is fine--very much necessary at times. Yet on a daily basis, from time to time, the brain and senses should do less than just shift down a gear--they must stop pushing altogether. If these essential breakaways are not planned, they will occur randomly, causing the space-outs that can wreak havoc at work and in personal relationships. Chances are, you’ve personally experienced such random mental fade-outs, as well as occasions when you literally fell asleep standing up.

We have dedicated our lives to doing, and trying to find ways to stay ahead, yet we still fall behind. Many of us feel there’s nothing we can’t do--except of course, doing nothing. Could ten well-chosen minutes of doing nothing be more valuable than ten minutes of pushing hard at your job? It very well could! All of the “pushing” itself can do us in. As cardiologist Robert Eliot puts it, “Often the first indication of heart disease is sudden death.”

Most of us have become obsessed with speed. We quickly make lots plans but then struggle to execute them on time. We create packed schedules that can’t be followed. We end up feeling inadequate and guilty. Fragmented and overloaded. With all of today’s time-saving high-technology gadgets, we’ve ended up with no free time. It’s time

to start going for walks and growing a garden--both can slow you down enough to smell the air!

It may be time for you to get really good at doing nothing (or something you really like) and not feel guilty about it. Learn to turn off the work mindset in an instant at the end of the day. That’s the difference between slowing down and getting gone. How can we ever hope to grasp the deeper possibilities of life, and lead invigorated or meaningful days, if we’re all dashing around nonstop like water bugs on the surface of a swirling river?

Most of us are not really good at disappearing by plan. Okay, we may space out in front of the television or doze off unexpectedly, but we’re poorly equipped to say, “I’m out of here” as we dive into the deep end of doing nothing and savoring every moment of it. I remember always being puzzled as to why someone would fish in a stale pond all day just to catch nothing. I get it now.

Here’s something try: Stand beside a big pile of unopened mail. Instead of opening it, just stand there for a bit and get some breathing space. Do you feel the tension tug inside your gut to go ahead and at least flip through it? This is when you feel that powerful “pull,” that force that makes you want to get “doing.” But don’t give in. Take deep breaths and enjoy a moment of doing nothing.

Next, spend some time watching a cat. Cats know almost everything there is about lounging and doing nothing. Emulate what you see. Sink way into the easy chair. No sudden moves. Stretch before you jump. Notice the small things a cat would see that you pay no attention to or never notice.

How about a nap? Here’s a suggestion: If you’ve got too much to do, take a nap--even just for ten minutes. (Don’t announce it to the world--it could be construed that you are lazy or don’t have any sense of urgency--be discreet about it.) Turns out a nap can be one of the best ways to revitalize the body and mind to meet upcoming demands with less effort and more ease. Think of it as digging an escape tunnel. When you resurface you have a fresh outlook. Churchill, Kennedy, Edison, and da Vinci all took short daily naps. Feel guilty about disappearing for a few minutes? They didn’t.

Which brings us to vacations. For many people the number of days each year spent on a holiday (relaxing, having fun, letting go, changing routine, going new places) are dwindling. We are filling this time instead with rushing faster and working harder. However, research shows that frequent getaways are vital for mind, body, heart, and health. In a long-term study of heart disease among middle-age men, those who took frequent vacations over a five-year period--even if only a few days at a time--had a lower risk of dying from any cause, including heart disease, over the next nine years.

All of this may seem like common sense, but unfortunately, common sense isn’t so common these days. And some people don’t take care of themselves even when they know they are harming themselves. Do what you know you should do. Take a break. Take care of yourself. Take some time to do nothing. Get away. Get gone.

~ The End ~