

Volume 7, Issue 5

MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

BEYOND THE JOB

Take time to recharge

**Downtime:
Make the Most of Your Breaks**

Parenting from the Heart

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I haven't been able to take a vacation for a little over two years. Personal and work commitments, along with financial restraints, just didn't allow for it.

I recently sat down at my computer one early morning, feeling frustrated and exhausted, to try and see for the nth time if I could maybe afford to take at least a few days off. My long to-do list and the bills to pay staring at me from my screen provided a clear "no" to that option. Discouraged, I got up and made myself a cup of coffee, and sat down on the porch of my small apartment. My eyes drifted to the beautiful olive tree branches overhanging it, and the tall poplar trees down the road, reaching up into the stark blue sky. Some birds sang their morning tunes from their branches in the otherwise quiet morning air.

Sitting there, I felt the stress fall away, and it dawned on me that even though I may not be able to take an extended vacation right now, I could take time each day to just breathe and relax right here in my own home.

While researching the topic for this issue of *Motivated* some time later, everything I read confirmed this. There's always something we can do to find that place of peace we need to recharge us and give us the strength we need for our tasks.

Of course, if we can swing it, a longer break or vacation each year would be great. But if you can't, I hope the articles and stories that encouraged me to recharge on a daily basis, will do the same for you!

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*

Taking Time to Sharpen My Axe

By Lilia Potters

This past month was very busy for me. So much so that at one point I found myself staring at my computer screen without registering what I was reading. After scanning the same email for the fifth time, I sighed, and reluctantly took a break.

Back at my computer a little while later, I absentmindedly clicked on a quote a friend had posted on Facebook, which led to this story:

Once upon a time, a very strong woodcutter asked a timber merchant for a job, and he got it. The pay was good and so were the work conditions. For those reasons, the woodcutter was determined to do his best.

His boss gave him an axe and showed him the area where he was supposed to work.

The first day, the woodcutter brought in 18 trees.

"Congratulations," the boss said. "Keep it up!"

Motivated by the boss' words, the woodcutter tried harder the next day, but he could only bring in 15 trees. The third day he tried even harder, but he could only bring in 10 trees. Day after day, he was bringing in fewer and fewer trees.

I must be losing my strength, the woodcutter thought. He went to the boss and apologized, saying that he could not understand what was going on.

"When was the last time you sharpened your axe?" the boss asked.

"Sharpen? I had no time to sharpen my axe. I've been busy trying to cut trees."

Coincidence? I don't think so! It was just what I needed to read, and it made me realize that I needed to regain the balance between work and rest.

I took some time that day to read something inspirational and listen to some music. I also made time to call some of my children, and afterward spent time playing a board game with two of my grandchildren. It meant turning off my computer early, and I had to resist checking my email on my smart phone, but it was worth it.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with activity and hard work. But I should not get so busy that I neglect the truly important things, such as investing in my personal life, taking time to meditate and rest, spending time with my family, etc. If I don't take the time to "sharpen the axe," I will become dull, and lose my effectiveness. ■

Beyond the Job:

Take time to recharge

Web Reprint, Author Unknown



Most of us have been there. Work is piling up, bills need to be paid, and kids are demanding attention. We want to relax—really, we do—but feelings of guilt prevent us from doing what it takes to just slow down and recharge our internal batteries. The truth is that taking a bit of “me” time is far from selfish. So often, we spend the majority of our time doing what it takes to pay those bills, attend to the needs of a growing family, or handle all sorts of other tasks. When we do this without taking time to tend to our own needs, we’re doing everyone around us a disservice, and we’re not helping ourselves, either. Here, we’ll examine the importance of downtime, plus we’ll offer a few hints for making the most of every minute.

Stress and Your Health

If you want to be healthy, you need downtime; it’s as simple as that. The time you give yourself to relax and recharge is not a luxury. Instead, it is a requirement for physical, mental, and emotional health. It’s important that you relax, no matter what your profession. If you have a stressful job, R&R time becomes even more important. If you don’t take time to relax, you risk burnout.

Job burnout caused by excess stress is a problem many people face. When you’re burned out, you don’t perform well. This can be a major problem, particularly if you work in public safety or are a health care professional of any type. People depend on you to do a good job; often, their lives depend on your ability to function properly.

No matter what your profession, you need to make rejuvenation an important part of your daily regimen. If you don’t, the stress of daily life can lead to problems like disrupted sleep, low attention span, and physical ailments. Without appropriate relaxation, you might turn to prescription drugs, or other “quick fixes,” which could ultimately make problems worse rather than helping to solve them.

If you believe that your work schedule is too busy to allow for daily downtime, it's time you reevaluate and re-prioritize. Just taking a few five-minute breaks during your regular work day will help you feel less stressed. Get some fresh air, stretch, grab a healthy snack, or spend a few minutes sharing a laugh with a co-worker. Remind yourself to notice how your body and mind feel when you begin to experience stress. When those signs manifest, get a break as soon as possible. Just taking this simple action will help you feel better immediately.

Ways to Incorporate Downtime into Your Schedule

Whether you want to perform better at work, be a better parent, or enjoy more fulfilling relationships, you'll benefit from downtime. When you are relaxed and rested, you'll feel a sense of empowerment, plus you will find it is much easier to remain focused at work.

- **Plan downtime.** Besides taking little breaks as opportunities arise, build time for yourself into your schedule. If you enjoy running or yoga, plan to do those physical activities a few times each week. If you enjoy getting pedicures or massages, make them a priority, too. No matter how you like to relax, pencil these things into your schedule, so you don't forget to do them. If you miss a "date" with yourself, reschedule it the same way you would if you couldn't make a meeting with an important contact.

- **Change your habits.** We all have habits that help us, and habits that don't do us much good at all. If you tend to go to sleep late after watching several hours of TV,

then end up dragging yourself out of bed in the morning, you are doing yourself no favors. Try shutting off the television at night and turning in early. Get up a little earlier than usual, and use the quiet hours of the morning to get some exercise, read something inspirational, or share breakfast with your significant other.

- **Simplify your routine.** Look for ways you can streamline your routine. If you tend to shop for groceries several times per week, try to cut back to doing this once or twice a week instead. If you have a hard time saying "no" when people ask you for favors, practice doing so. Don't feel that you must explain or make excuses; just say no.

It may take you some time to get used to relaxing. You may find old guilty thoughts intruding, or you may start making excuses to skip downtime. If this happens, remind yourself that recharging is a necessity, and that failing to relax will cause your stress levels to skyrocket to unhealthy levels.

Just like eating properly and getting enough exercise, relaxation is an important component of a healthy lifestyle. Since relaxation helps us reduce our stress levels, it improves our health.

Do what makes you feel happy, and remember that while work is important and valuable, it's not the most important thing in life. Take just a little downtime every day and relax deeply each evening. Pay attention to personal relationships, and give yourself permission to slow down. These simple changes will enhance your life experience, plus it will help keep you focused when the stakes are high.

Breathe, relax, and unwind. You deserve it. ■

Do You Feed Your Body, but Starve Your Soul?

By Gail Rodgers, adapted

She said she felt flat. It felt like she was running on empty. She knew that something was missing in her life. It was like a hunger deep within. I asked her what she had been feeding her spirit. “What do you mean?” she asked.

Just as our body needs food, so does our spirit. We rarely think about the diet our spirit is getting. Taking a close look at what you have been feeding your spirit will likely reveal why that deep hunger exists at times. Where has your focus been?

Ask yourself a few questions...

- Am I allowing my spirit to spiral down with thinking filled with worry?
- Has busyness crowded out my quiet time to think about the choices I am making? We change with the influences around us.
- Is my entertainment feeding me things that actually rob my spirit?
- Am I surrounding myself with people that encourage me or pull me down?
- What desires am I focusing on?
- Who am I becoming?

Check it out. Is your soul hungry? Does it feel like something is missing? Take one week and pay close attention to the needs of your spirit, and feed it with positive and faith-building thoughts. Pray, and meditate, and let peace penetrate your heart. It will feed and fill you in ways you have forgotten. Don't settle for less. ■



What Are You Feeding Your Heart and Mind?

By Lori Deschene

The other day I read about an insightful Native American myth. A tribal elder tells his grandson that inside each of us, there is a black wolf and a white wolf doing battle.

The black wolf possesses qualities typically understood as negative, including envy, greed, sorrow, anger, resentment, and arrogance. The white wolf possesses qualities understood as positive, including love, joy, kindness, empathy, compassion, humility, and peace.

The grandson asks, “Which wolf will win the fight?” And the elder responds, “Whichever one we feed.”

What an empowering call to action. We can reap tremendous benefits from asking ourselves: What am I nurturing in myself today?

We can choose to dwell on everything we think is wrong, complain about it to everyone who’ll listen, focus on everything we think we lack, and generally go through our days feeding negativity.

Or we can choose to engage with the world in ways that feel right, talk about the things that excite us, focus on everything that makes us feel fortunate, and generally go through our days feeding positivity.

Of course, there is a third, likely more realistic option: We can do

our best to recognize when we’re doing the former, and then make the conscious choice to do the latter.

We may never completely eliminate negative thoughts, but we can learn to catch them, and turn them into positive thoughts with increasing regularity.


We may not always feel loving and kind, but we can choose to meditate, pray, or do whatever helps us create inner calm, so as to cultivate those feelings more often.

We may never feel permanently peaceful, but we can choose to question our envy, resentment, and discontent to develop self-awareness and act on what we learn.

It also serves us to recognize that we all come from different places, and despite our similarities, we each have our own unique blend of challenges.

This means it’s our job to recognize how we’re out of balance, without judging why it’s so or comparing ourselves to other people, so we can focus on doing our best to nurture good thoughts and feelings.

We don’t live in a purely positive world, and we can’t control everything that happens to us—but we can make the world a better place by first striving to know and nourish ourselves. ■



DOWNTIME: MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR BREAKS

Web Reprint, adapted

You're rushed. You're overbooked. You're going at top speed. Yet the more you do, the less you seem to get done. But there's a way to stop this stressful cycle.

"Pull the plug and give yourself some downtime," suggests Maryann Troiani, PsyD, a psychologist in Barrington, Illinois, and co-author of "Spontaneous Optimism: Proven Strategies for Health, Prosperity and Happiness." "Everybody needs some time just for themselves, to refresh and recharge both mentally and physically. When you come back after

a break, you feel better and you work better, too."

Dr. Troiani defines downtime as a "break from the gottas—as in I gotta do this and I gotta do that." It's unstructured and usually unplanned time when you do something you really want to do—or, even better, nothing at all. She prescribes at least one hour of downtime two or three times per week.

Most people don't get even this small amount of time to themselves. "Even when you're alone, there are too many ways the world can intrude on you and

vice versa—cell phones, email, voice mail. All those distractions dilute your creativity and energy,” she says.

People also become experts at multitasking. Juggling family, career, and other demands leaves little time for oneself.

Those lucky enough to have leisure time often believe they have to fill it with hobbies or errands. “But that’s not downtime,” says Dr. Troiani.

By the same token, you’re missing the point if you obsessively schedule periods of downtime at the same time each week, whether you’re in the mood or not.

Instead, just go with the flow. Give in to that urge to take a walk, or to pick up that book you’ve been wanting to read. Pour a cup of tea and stop to watch the sunset.

Find the time

“Don’t think of downtime as goofing off,” says Dr. Troiani. “It’s an investment that helps you get control of your life—particularly of the stress and tension. It calms down your body and makes your mind more focused so you can deal with things more effectively.”

Even when you give yourself permission, though, it can still be hard to spot opportunities to take a break—at least at first. The following suggestions can help you find more time for yourself:

- **Cut the cords.** Don’t feel you have to respond to every signal from the outside world. Turn off your computer and leave the cell phone behind.

- **Say no to “emotional vampires.”** “People who use you as a sounding board for whining and complaints can drain away a lot of your time and energy,” says Dr. Troiani. If someone is constantly coming to you with gripes, set boundaries. Tell the person you have only five minutes, then use the time to focus on solutions.
- **Play hooky.** Look over your daily routine to see what’s truly important and where you might cut yourself some slack. Can you miss that meeting or put off that trip to the store?
- **Brown-bag it.** Instead of fighting the crowds at the cafeteria, bring lunch from home and find a quiet, pleasant place to enjoy it. Use the extra time to take a walk.
- **Seize the moment.** The best downtime opportunities are often unplanned. Open your mind to what’s happening around you and be willing to respond.
- **Free your mind.** Worries and other negative feelings can keep you from enjoying your downtime. To get rid of the clutter, visualize a vacuum cleaner as it pulls the bad feelings out of your head.
- **Relieve the pressure.** Don’t expect too much of your downtime. The point isn’t to write a great novel, it’s just to relax. Keep your expectations simple.

“Listen to your inner voice,” advises Dr. Troiani. “See what your mind and body need at that moment. You don’t need to make a lot of plans—just do what feels right.” ■

SELF-CARE FOR EXHAUSTED PARENTS:

PARENTING
FROM THE HEART



How do you recharge your batteries?

By Rebecca Wolfenden, adapted

How do you take care of yourself and relieve stress as a parent?

When I was in school for social work, very little was said about self-care. Sure, a few professors might have remarked about “stress” or “parental burnout,” but no one really addressed how we were supposed to take care of ourselves in stressful situations.

As a parent, you are the number one caregiver in your home for your children, not to mention your other responsibilities, such as caring for your own parents, or being a financial provider for your family. If you are the parent of a child with diagnoses like Autism, ADD/ADHD, Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD), or other behavioral issues, it’s even more important that you take care of yourself. When you’re parenting a child with behavioral issues, it can be a draining, frustrating, and demanding task. It’s vital to take some time to yourself so that you have the energy to respond to your child and to the behavior you are seeing, rather than reacting from an emotional, exhausted state. If you don’t take this time, the effects of this built-up stress can lead to increased irritability, fatigue, and even health problems.

Now, I know many of you are reading this and thinking, “Yeah, right! How

can I possibly think of recharging my batteries when my child is screaming at me, refusing to do homework, and getting in trouble all the time?!?!” I understand that; however, self-care does not mean taking an extended vacation, or a trip to the spa every week (although that would be nice!). The key to taking care of yourself is to regularly schedule some time for YOU. Put it on your calendar, and keep that commitment to yourself.

One trick I have found that works for me is to find those hidden pockets of time that I can use. One example is your daily commute. Instead of stressing over the mountain of work that you have waiting for you at your desk, or rehashing the fight you had with your child that morning, try listening to a CD, audiobook, or radio program you enjoy. Singing (loudly) in the car can be very therapeutic! Another method to try is some deep breathing. The great thing about this is you can do it anywhere at any time, even when you are in an argument with your child, or other stressful situation.

An additional tactic to find some time for yourself is getting up early in the morning or blocking out some time one evening a week, and using that time for yourself. Note that I said, “for yourself”, and not for tackling your daily tasks. Use

this time to linger over a cup of coffee, tea, or health shake, journal, take a class, work on a craft project, or exercise. Find a supportive, nonjudgmental friend or family member you can call when you really need to talk. If it's another parent in the same boat, and you can find some humor in the situation together, that can be very helpful—sometimes laughter is the best release out there.

Doing something physical can serve a couple of purposes, as well, as it is a proven stress reliever and can also give you the physical boost of energy you need to get through your day. It doesn't need to be intensive marathon training either—a simple walk or working in a garden is also beneficial.

The key to effective self-care is to find something, or a couple of things, that you enjoy, and making time to do it. Although it may feel selfish to do this, it's actually replenishing your energy stores so that you have the stamina and the clarity to keep up with your multiple responsibilities of caring for everyone else. It's like the classic example of the airline safety demonstration: you have to put on your own oxygen before you can help those around you.

What do you do to take care of yourself? Or, what small steps are you going to take to start? Tells us at motivated@motivatedmagazine.com. ■



Recharge

Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is relax.—Mark Black

While there's nothing wrong in being very productive, your brain still needs some rest to be fully operational whenever you need it.—Debeena Harris

Show me a worrying person and I will show you a person who does not know how to relax.—Albert E. Cliffe

No matter how much pressure you feel at work, if you could find ways to relax for at least five minutes every hour, you'd be more productive.—Dr. Joyce Brothers

He enjoys true leisure who has time to improve his soul's estate.
—Henry David Thoreau

Sometimes it's important to work for that pot of gold. But other times it's essential to take time off and to make sure that your most important decision in the day simply consists of choosing which color to slide down on the rainbow.
—Douglas Pagels

Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop.—Ovid

Never lose sight of this important truth: no one can be truly great until he has gained a knowledge of himself, a knowledge which can only be acquired by occasional retirement.—Johann Georg von Zimmermann

For fast-acting relief try slowing down.
—Lily Tomlin

Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer. Go some distance away because then the work appears smaller, and more of it can be taken in at a glance and a lack of harmony and proportion is more readily seen.—Leonardo Da Vinci

