

FEEL OVERWHELMED? DO..... NOTHING!

That's right. Doing nothing is a central to mental health as well as creativity. I know this flies in the face of everything we hard working Americans have been taught from the time we could walk! The work ethic has been our standard for success in life. You know - "No Pain No Gain" and "Make Hay while the Sun Shines". We believe phrases like "Genius is 90% Perspiration and 10% Inspiration". We expect ourselves to work hard to earn a living and provide for our families. We take pride in a job well done and this is a good thing. However, there is another phrase that is also true, "All Work and No Play Makes Jack a Dull Boy". Take that one step farther and say doing nothing is necessary for our well-being. After all, isn't there a famous saying that goes something like this: "On the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath day of complete rest. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall surely be put to death!" Those are strong words but they make a point about rest and doing nothing being important for us.

The work ethic is a relatively recent phenomenon. For most of history work was seen as something negative done as a means to an end. Work was even looked at as a punishment from God. Leisure and intellectual fulfillment were the ideals in Roman and Greek cultures. Of course, slaves may not have

shared their beliefs as they bore the brunt of physical labor. The rise of our Judeo-Christian heritage changed this and attached positive attributes to working hard. Work also became connected to character traits: "She is a hard worker = a good person, or He's a lazy good for nothing". Attitudes toward some work became more positive as the world became more technically complex and many jobs required high levels of skill. This eventually led us to today when people often work fifty or sixty hours a week and feel driven to do even more. The positive effects of a job well done diminish as the hours pile up and the physical and mental toll override sense of accomplishment. People often begin to notice they no longer derive pleasure from work, they feel exhausted, depressed, and anxious. Ultimately, feel trapped in this cycle.

Does this sound familiar to you? Are you like Jack; dull, mentally foggy, uninterested, burned out? Do you feel like your physical and emotional well-being is deteriorating? If so, doing nothing may come to your rescue. There is even an Italian phrase for this, La Dolce Far Niente or The Sweetness of Doing Nothing. What if you stopped, took a deep breath, and instead of "doing", spent a moment "not" doing? How about subtracting from rather than adding to your daily

grind? What if you stopped doing just one more task, turned off the screens, let that phone call wait, and halted? There is a growing body of evidence that suggests doing nothing on a regular basis actually inspires greater creativity and a more productive life. Not wasting time, rather, relaxing from within, enjoying the present moment, letting our minds wander, or quietly reading or listening to music. It is not easy because we are accustomed to being constantly busy. We may feel guilty.

If you do this you might be surprised about the thoughts you have, the ideas you develop, and the restorative affects you experience. **Try the following routine every day for the next week and see if you notice a difference:** 1. Shut off distractions 2. Sit quietly 3. Just breath regularly and let you mind be empty of all the noisy thoughts that usually crowd it. 4. Let natural thoughts fill that empty space. At work do this for five minutes every morning and afternoon. On weekends take a short nap or rest in the afternoon. Go for a fifteen-minute walk in a quiet area and pay attention. Enjoy nature. In the process, improve your life, melt away stress and make yourself more productive when you work.

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