

GETTING IT ALL DONE WITHOUT GIVING IT ALL UP

RITUALS OF RENEWAL THAT REVITALIZE LIFE

THE WORKAHOLIC

By his own admission, Bruce R. was a workaholic. A highly successful 43-year-old executive for a magazine publishing company, he regularly arrived at work at 7 a.m., ate lunch most days at his desk, never left earlier than 7 p.m. and often worked at home into late evening.

Bruce prided himself on his work ethic, and the fact that he was willing to put in longer hours than any of his colleagues –as many as 80 a week. At the same time, he was beginning to wonder why he was working so many hours when everyone else seemed to be able to get their work done in much less time, leaving more time for family and relaxation. He acknowledged that his schedule was definitely taking a toll on him and on his family,

His output hadn't outwardly diminished yet, but his long days left him feeling racy and distracted and his sense of resentment and edginess had noticeably increased. He had two children, 12 and 8, and his wife had stopped working when the second child was born. Increasingly she complained that he was rarely available to the family.

Bruce felt especially guilty about not being a more involved father. His own father had been a highly driven corporate executive who devoted very little time to his family and Bruce felt that he had suffered from his father's absence. He came to be my client as he was seeking help in finding more balance in his life. He wanted to be more energized for his family and he wanted to improve health, but he made it clear that he wasn't willing to sacrifice his performance in work that he loved.

We discussed the concepts of spending energy and then allowing time to recover energy, as a means of increasing overall capacity and the ability to be more engaged in each of our activities. If periodically disengaging had the potential to help him be more effective at work, he found that reassuring. Highly structured by nature, he was willing to experiment with building rituals of renewal. The key was to find forms of recovery that truly helped him to change channels and disengage from his work.

When I asked Bruce what non-work activities gave him a feeling of real relaxation, the first one that he thought of was getting his shoes shined. He worked in a midtown Manhattan high-rise, and there was a shoeshine parlor three blocks from his office. Bruce decided that three times a week he would get up from his desk at 10:00 a.m. and walk to the shoeshine parlor. He had a favorite shoeshine man there, a buoyant man in his 60s who told wonderful stories. Between the walk to the stand, the shoeshine itself and the entertaining conversation,

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Bruce found those 20 minutes to be almost pure pleasure. He didn't have enough shoes to justify a visit 5 days a week, so on Tuesdays and Thursdays, his break consisted instead of walking down 10 flights of stairs to the Starbucks near his office and having his one cherished cup of coffee for the day.

For lunch, Bruce still preferred not to go out, but he agreed to set aside his work during the 15 or 20 minutes that he was willing to set aside.

A classical music aficionado, he decided to put on his Walkman and listen to Beethoven or Mozart while he ate. Bruce's wife had begun to study yoga, and introduced it at home. He felt this was another form of recovery that he could use. He found the breathing especially restful.

At 3:00 p.m., he closed the door to his office, took off his shoes and went through his postures on the floor for 10 minutes and went through ten minutes of deep breathing while sitting on the floor. It took him just four weeks to lock in these new rituals.

Over time, Bruce built two other recovery rituals into his life. The first was for weekends. He wasn't prepared to give up work altogether, but in order to give more of himself to his family, he limited weekend work to two short, specific periods of time. The first was early Saturday mornings from 6:00 to 8:00 a.m., usually before anyone else was up. This allowed him to focus on paperwork that he had found difficult to get done at the office, and not to have it weigh on him throughout the weekend. Unless there was an emergency, Bruce committed not to work on business at all the rest of Saturday and throughout the day Sunday. The second work period was from 8:00-10:00 PM. on Sunday evenings, after his children went to sleep. This gave him the opportunity catch up on email that came in over the weekend and plan for the week ahead.

The other recovery ritual that Bruce built was specifically for travel. He spent a fair amount of time on airplanes and he had always found this part of his life stressful and energy depleting. After 9/11, it became more difficult than ever. In an effort to transform his experience and to give himself a positive source of recovery, Bruce began packing a book that he would read purely for pleasure. He permitted himself to read the book only when he was on an airplane. The result was that he began to enjoy travel in a way that he never had before. Flying became a source of enjoyment rather than an added stress in his life.

The impact of this small group of rituals on Bruce's life was remarkable. By taking two 15-20 minute breaks during the day, and putting his work aside during lunch, his energy level, focus and productivity all increased significantly. His mood improved so dramatically that one colleague jokingly asked if he had begun taking Prozac.

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THE LINK BETWEEN EXERCISE EXPOSURE AND PERFORMANCE

Given the number of benefits we derive even from moderate exercise, it seems extraordinary that the vast majority of Americans do almost none. The explanation is surprisingly simple. Building strength and endurance requires pushing past our comfort zones and experiencing discomfort. It takes time before the obvious benefits kick in, and most of us quit before that ever occurs.

- DuPont reported a 47.5% reduction in absenteeism over a 6-year period for participants in a corporate fitness program. They also found that such employees used 14 per cent fewer disability days than non-participants – a total of nearly 12,000 fewer disability days overall.
- A study in the journal *Ergonomics* concluded that “Mental performance was significantly better in the physically fit than in the un-fit. Fit workers committed 27% fewer errors on tasks involving concentration and short-term memory as compared to un-fit workers.”
- In a study of 80 executives over a nine month period, those who worked out regularly improved their fitness by 22% and demonstrated a 70% improvement in their ability to make complex decisions as compared with non-exercisers. .
- The Canadian Life Assurance Company found that 63% of participants in a fitness program reported being more physically relaxed, less tired and more patient during the work-day. Forty-seven per cent reported being more alert, had better rapport with supervisors and co-workers, and experienced a higher level of enjoyment at work.
- At Union Pacific Railroad, 75% of employees reported that regular exercise improved their concentration and overall productivity at work.
- General Motors found that employees who participated in a physical fitness program had a 50% reduction in job grievances and on-the-job accidents, and a 40% reduction in lost time.
- The Coors Brewing Company found that it got as much as a \$6.15 return for every \$1 invested in a corporate fitness program. Companies including Equitable Life Assurance, General Mills and Motorola all reported at least a \$3 return for every dollar invested.

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