

Last weekend I took time to go to the lake. I came back relaxed and ready to tackle another busy week. Some people mistakenly think a weekend here or there is good enough, and they spend their weeks busy every waking minute. I advise my coaching clients to look at their calendars and identify how much of their time is spent “thinking” versus always “doing”. The first step in intentionally living is becoming aware of how you spend your time.

What is Missing from Your Calendar?

The importance of setting aside downtime and thinking time cannot be overstated. We see more clearly, we hear more keenly, we are more inspired, we discover what makes us feel alive. Consistency is key and here are some things to consider when reviewing your calendar.

Rethink how you view your calendar - In an interview Charlie Rose conducted with Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, Buffet told Gates, "It's the only thing you can't buy. I mean, I can buy anything I want, basically, but I can't buy time." Gates said that Buffet taught him the importance of giving time to yourself. Do you fill your calendar up for others before yourself?

Understand What Type of Time You Need – In a Harvard Business Review article, “Schedule Time for Reflective Thinking Every Week”, Daniel Kahneman, author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, found that reflective thinking (slow and deliberative) and reactive thinking (fast and instinctual) effectively exist at opposite ends of a switch. When one is “on,” the other is “off.” Do you spend time reflective thinking?

Get a Coach - The HBR article goes on to say one way to stimulate reflection is to get a coach, because, “To inspire and refine reflective thought, leaders will often benefit from structured dialogue with a trusted partner.” Do you

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have a mentor, friend, or coach to ask you the tough questions you are avoiding?

Focus on the important stuff – Sometime people stay busy unconsciously working on items that are not at the top of their priority list to avoid thinking about the important things in life or because they are focusing too much on the hot topic of the day. Former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was quoting Dr J. Roscoe Miller in a speech, said: "I have two kinds of problems: the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent." Do you know which activities on calendar are urgent versus important?

Seek Out New Knowledge – Business is always changing, and it is important to stay up to date by reading material about your industry and career. Your new knowledge can increase productivity and help you solve problems. Reading for pleasure is also needed and is a way to exercising your mind while taking a break. When was the last time you read something interesting?

Schedule time for Creativity – Emma Seppälä, co-director of wellness at Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and author of *The Happiness Track: How to Apply the Science of Happiness to Accelerate Your Success*, says, “Simply put, creativity happens when your mind is unfocused, daydreaming or idle.” When was the last time you cleared your head and had a great idea come to you?

Write It Down - Journaling by hand slows your mind down and lets your thoughts happen as a stream of conscious. Stephen Covey says, "Keeping a personal journal, a daily in-depth analysis and evaluation of your experiences, is a high-leverage activity that increases self-awareness." You can start by prompting yourself to write about any struggles you had recently and how they made you feel or what you learned from them. What questions would journaling help you answer?

Be a Role Model – Letting your direct reports know that you schedule time on your calendar for thinking will foster a culture of reflection. Another benefit is that they will know you trust others to do their work while you are focusing on thinking. Would people suspect from your calendar you value deep thinking?

Since 2001, Harmony Coaching & Consulting has partnered with organizations, industries and individuals to maximize human talent for improved efficiency, profitability and personal growth. I have seen that personal growth is more likely to happen when there is time on the work calendar for it to happen. The focus has to extend to your whole life to truly effect personal growth and work-life balance.

Claim Some of the Empty Spaces on Your Calendar for Idle Time

You're just about to leave for your dentist appointment, when you receive a phone call saying the dentist has been called out on emergency and will have to reschedule your appointment. Congratulations! You are the winner of one unexpected free hour! What will you do with your winnings? Answer your email? Return to the project you were working on before you had to leave? Pay bills? Return phone calls? Ever consider doing nothing?

If you're like many of us today, the thought of doing absolutely nothing for an entire hour seems as wasteful as throwing a week's worth of groceries out with the garbage. Indeed, free time with nothing to do can generate near panic among some of us who are overloaded and time-starved.

"We seem to have a complex about busyness in our culture," says Thomas Moore, author of *Care of the Soul*. "Most of us do have time in our days that we could devote to simple relaxation, but we convince ourselves that we don't."

And yet, the harder we push, the more we need to replenish ourselves. As Stephan Rechtschaffen, author of *Timeshifting*, says, "Each of us needs some time that is strictly and entirely our own, and we should experience it daily."

On some level, we know this already. But claiming time to ourselves—time that is often labeled "unproductive"—and sticking to it can be difficult. We need to establish formal boundaries around our idle time to ensure that others—and we, ourselves—honor this time. Some ways to do this are:

- **Make a date with yourself.** Get to know someone who deserves your attention—you.
- **Stand firm.** Learn how to say "no" to co-workers, children, a spouse or a friend. In just a short while, you can say "yes," but now is your time.
- **Be clear about your needs.** It's not, "I need more time to myself." It's more like, "I'd like to spend 20 minutes by myself in the morning before everyone gets up."
- **Be on the lookout for stolen moments.** Use the canceled dental appointment to sit on a park bench watching pigeons.
- **Practice doing nothing.** "Doing nothing" is an art, and like all art you need to practice it to reach your highest potential.

How we define idle time varies by individual. For example, for one person, gardening may be meditative downtime, whereas for another, it is one more item on the to-do list (to be done as quickly as possible). The woods are a great place to stroll through for one person, an opportunity to be in and with nature; for another, it's a great place for a power walk while dictating letters into a small tape recorder.

Our idle time should be like a beautiful flower: it has no purpose. It's just there. And yet, it refreshes us and reminds us of nature's glory.

Do something that has no purpose other than joy. Take a half-hour a day to surprise and delight yourself. Keep it simple and keep it consistent. If your idle time becomes a "program," or becomes progress toward some productive goal, begin again. It's stunning, how simple it really is.

Whatever your personal growth needs are, an executive coach can work with you to identify your current state (strengths, performance, and challenges) and the "perfect" or future state you wish to achieve. Working together, a plan/strategy is developed to bridge the gap between where you are and where you want to be. Meeting with your coach on a regular basis for support, guidance and encouragement you work through the co-developed strategy. The coach acts, in a totally confidential manner, much like a navigator and accountability partner while you take the actions necessary to achieve your goals.

As a coach, I don't only work on the "what," I also work on the "who," who you are and want to be. If you're interested in exploring a coaching relationship, contact Bill Burtch at Harmony for a consultation at 901-272-7390 or bburtch@harmonycc.net



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Schedule of Public Courses

The following courses are being offered to the public by Harmony Coaching & Consulting. Click on the associated link for more information on the program or to register.

Course Title	Date(s)	Time	For More Information/Registration
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[*The Coaching Clinic*](#)

[*Feb 19&20*](#)

[*8:30 am – 5:00 pm*](#)

