

SmartBlog on Leadership

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[The fear of slowing down](#)

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on October 20th, 2014

An **article** this summer in The New York Times quoted extensively from a research study conducted by Silicon Valley psychologist Stephanie Brown which refers to our collective **fear of slowing down**. Brown found that people who are alone with their own thoughts for more than a few minutes become agitated and seek any kind of stimulation they can find in order to avoid thinking.

“There’s this widespread belief that thinking and feeling will only slow you down and get in your way, but it’s the opposite,” she said.

Case in point: A study by Benjamin Baird and colleagues at the University of California, Santa Barbara, shows that **daydreaming and fantasizing unleash fantastic amounts of creativity** and allow people to problem-solve because they feel free to look at problems and challenges without deadlines and outside pressures.

Have you had a creative daydream lately? Would you like to? Here’s how to get started.

- Disconnect
- Compartmentalize
- Get fit
- Have fun

1. **Disconnect.** You can’t constantly be connected or you’ll become **overwhelmed and overworked**. Yes, that means turn off the electronics. Shut down the computer, the iPad, the Smartphone whenever your work day ends and don’t fire them up again until the next workday starts. If the world comes to an end in the meantime, someone will be sure to let you know. You might also experiment with a media-free day. No TV, radio, or video games. If a day (or night) sounds like too much, try it for an hour or two and work your way up to a day.

2. **Compartmentalize.** This means **separating work time from play time**, family time, and your time. Whatever your work culture dictates (9 to 5, 7 to 3), work those hours and only those hours. Don’t take work home at night or on weekends. When you’re working, give it your all. But once you walk out the door, transition immediately into a new mental and physical state. If you have a long commute, use the time to decompress rather than listening to the news or returning work-related phone calls. When you get home, shed your work clothes immediately and get into something that makes you feel casual and relaxed. Shift your focus.

3. **Get fit.** Exercise is a great relaxer of both body and mind. For one thing, a lot of it is fairly routine. You don’t have to think about how to run on the treadmill or maneuver the elliptical trainer. Let your mind wander. Better still, if you can run or walk outdoors, you’ll have plenty of visual aids to redirect your busy thoughts. A healthy body supports creative thinking. And fitness is not just about your body. Your mind needs to stay fit as well. The word “meditation” scares a lot of people because they don’t understand how to do it. It’s as

simple as sitting quietly and breathing for 10 or 15 minutes a day. Let your mind wander and don't try to control where your thoughts take you.

4. **Have fun.** Remember fun? Maybe you haven't had any real fun since the fifth grade. But it's never too late. Write out a bucket list of fun activities. (Hint: taking clients to a baseball game does not count.) Whether it's whitewater rafting, taking a photography class or learning Italian cooking — get completely out of your comfort zone. Take one day a month off, just for you. Schedule at least one **vacation** a year, preferably two. And remember No. 1 above — disconnect completely when you're having fun.

Take action now: Look carefully at the four items above. If you're already doing one or more of these things, give yourself a pat on the back. Is there one you're sure you couldn't possibly do? Start there. Do it for a month, until it becomes a habit you can't live without. Then move on to the next one. Notice how your mood, your relationships, and your creativity change.

Heed the words of art critic James Huneker: "All men (and women) of action are dreamers." That could be you.

*Joel Garfinkle is available for **speaking and training**. His most popular program is "Perception, Visibility and Influence: 3 Best Practices to Help Leaders Be More Successful." He is the author of 300 articles on leadership and seven books, including "**Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level**." More than 10,000 people subscribe to his Fulfillment@Work newsletter. **Subscribe** and you'll receive the free e-book "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!" If you enjoyed this article, join **SmartBrief's e-mail list** for our daily newsletter on being a better, smarter leader.*