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Smelling the Roses: An Investment in Better Health and Energy

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Millard MacAdam

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Chasing the clock and racing through most days of your life is bad for your physical, emotional and spiritual health. So why do you continue to do it? Are you addicted to the fast pace?

To begin breaking this fast-pace pattern, know that it elevates your levels of stress hormones which drain your energy and make you more susceptible to illnesses like heart disease. According to a recent survey, 31 percent of men and 39 percent of women feel rushed? and women tend to feel that way regardless of how much discretionary time they have. Are you among this group?

To stay healthy and feel energetic, you can intentionally slow down. However, if you have too many obligations or consider "doing nothing" a waste of time, intentionally slowing down is easier said than done.

A step toward "Smelling the Roses" is to recognize you can't effectively serve others if you are on the verge of physical, emotional or spiritual collapse yourself. Everyone needs to recharge their critical reserves regularly in all three of the above areas.

Below are the top ten things I recommend you intentionally do to protect yourself from burn out and stress-related diseases. They will help you gain and maintain optimum physical, emotional, and spiritual health and vitality.

CHECK THE FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY OF YOUR HURRIEDNESS LEVEL - Hurrying and rushing around mentally, physically and emotionally can become a self-inflictive habit. The high speed technology that surrounds you and me encourages the false notion that "faster is better." A recent Associated Press poll estimates that 60 percent of the population is always in a rush. Too many of these "rushers" lose patience when spending five minutes on hold on the phone or in a line.

When you find yourself ill at ease or rushing around, pause to ask yourself if in the scheme of things it really matters if you get where you're going to complete a task 10 minutes later.

WELCOME THE WAIT

- In place of getting up tight while you're waiting at your doctor's office or standing still in traffic, consider the delay as the extra time you desire and deserve to reflect, relax your neck and shoulder muscles, or rest gently while waiting.

Arrive at your appointments prepared in advance for down time. Keep a novel, an MP3 music player, a crossword puzzle and some thank-you notes in your briefcase for easy access. If

you're restless or don't want to do any of the above things, think calming thoughts. This can be counting your blessings, recollecting in great detail the most peaceful place you've ever been, or congratulating yourself for good things you've done recently. All relieve stress because positive thoughts help your mind and body to quickly relax if you dwell on them for between six to ten seconds.

ASSERTIVELY AND POLITELY SAY "NO!" - You can avoid stress and take time for relaxation by saying "no" to commitments others want you to make, even for worthy causes, if they are likely to leave you overscheduled and overwhelmed. You should never be too busy to take a break and "smell some roses." If you find it difficult to decline a friend, boss or worthy cause, say something like, "What you want done is really worthwhile but my plate is too full right now for me to do it well and in a timely way. It's important to me that I keep my promises and not let others down so I'm saying "no" to your request. Do you understand?"

TRANSITION FROM USING A "TO-DO" TO A "MUST-DO" LIST - List only the very few tasks that really need to be done and for which you have the time to effectively address. Eliminating all but the highly relevant and essential tasks will help you slow down and reduce mental, physical and emotional pressures. Ponder the wisdom of King Solomon in his conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes in the Holy Bible, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

FOCUS ON ONE THING AT A TIME - Stop watching TV and reading the newspaper at the same time, or reading your emails while talking on the phone. You will comprehend less out of both and reinforce your sense of time pressure. Research shows that continually having competing demands on your time and attention causes stress. It also shows that multitasking decreases personal productivity and increases personal errors.

SCHEDULE THINGS INTENTIONALLY AND STRATEGICALLY - If a given day of your week is loaded with "must do" tasks, lighten your tasks for the following day. That means making sure you don't even schedule too many pleasurable activities so you avoid having two intensely active days in a row.

INTENTIONALLY ENGAGE IN PERIODIC RESPITES AND MOMENTS OF SOLITUDE - Renewing your mind, body and soul is an investment! Your body isn't designed to operate without rest or to handle non-stop demands on your physical and emotional energy. When stressed by a hectic schedule and constant activity, you run at higher revolutions physically and emotionally which will prematurely wear you out and speed up the aging process.

Slowing down for just a few minutes every hour can be beneficial for your health. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, or get a little exercise or a breath of fresh air. Even a brief break allows your body to recover and resets your stress thermostat from high gear to cruise control.

TURN OFF TO TUNE UP - Given the electronic tools of cell phones, laptops and PDAs, you

can be "connected" 24-7. To reclaim some personal discretionary time a couple of times during the day, momentarily turn off all of your electronic tools. Free from the demands and intrusions of others, you can then intentionally invest some new-found discretionary time to tune yourself up by relaxing, reflecting on important things, and recharging your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual reserves.

FOCUS ON ENJOYING THE MOMENT - You won't disrupt your daily routine if you take momentary breathers. Reflecting on and appreciating what you are engaged in or observing what's going on around you will give your mind a renewing rest. Everything around you has its own special magic and wonder, and when you slow down you'll start to notice this.

While you wait for the coffee pot to finish its job, take a look out a window and marvel at the nature around you? the birds, the ice shining on the tree limbs or the sun's patterns on the ground.

ENGAGE IN A LOW-PACE HOBBY - Some stress experts say that a more relaxed day-to-day routine won't relax you if you're addicted to hurrying. If you are, a low-pace pastime, such as reading, painting, or gardening, can help you slow down your pace. And, according to some experts, leisurely hobbies with repetitive and rhythmic motions, such as knitting and woodworking may even elicit the relaxation response? a feeling of calm that has been shown to enhance your health.

Here are my top picks for books which will help, guide and encourage you to more frequently "Smell the Roses."

The Joy of Laziness - Peter Axt and Michaela Axt-Gadermann, MD

In Praise of Slowness - Carl Honore

Stress Free for Good - Frederic Luskin, PhD and Dr. Kenneth R. Pelletier

Book of Ecclesiastes in the Holy Bible - King Solomon

If you need help in mastering and implementing any of the skills and tactics mentioned, I'm here for you! Please visit the Call-A-Coach section of my web site for more information.

About the author:

Dr. Mac shares with business owners the practical knowledge and insights he gained as a small company CEO. He founded Sycamore Ranch, Inc. when 27 and as CEO led his partners and a staff of 100 for 16 years in developing and operating the 50 acre recreational facility. Years later, he integrated what he learned from his Doctoral program at USC with his practical

business experiences and began consulting. For four decades Mac's coached business owners in mastering and applying "how to" leadership and managerial skills for: Hiring and retaining only the top ten percent producers; Optimally deploying and supervising staff to maximize their personal motivation; Developing high integrity leadership teams; Facilitating mutual performance accountability and peer coaching processes; and, Integrating his Intentional Business Integrity Process into their company operations. Mac has served leaders in manufacturing and high tech companies; accounting, banking and insurance enterprises; medical and health care organizations; service and retail oriented businesses; as well as educational, governmental and non profit organizations. Q&A ProActive Leadership 888-648-5552 or MacAdam@PALConsulting

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