

Life in the Slow Lane

Getting re-energized by doing nothing

I broke my foot. Don't ask. It's my right foot, too. And it's the beginning of the summer. Oh, yeah, and absolutely no driving. I'm stuck here in the house feeling kind of like Jimmy Stewart in *Rear Window*, except I've traded in the wheelchair and binoculars for a set of crutches and a laptop.

It takes a lot of planning before I move from one room to another, making sure I've packed enough supplies to keep me going for a few hours. I'm like a nomad. Survivorman. My wife (Grace Kelly) tied a small canvas bag to the side of one crutch, and before I hit the road I make sure it's packed with all my essentials: phone, pen, paper, food, book, ChapStick.

So I spend a few hours on the deck, then move the whole party inside to the den. To the kitchen. Back on the deck. To the kitchen. Well, you get the idea.

Before I broke my foot, my life was on automatic. Like Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*, I woke up every morning at 6 a.m., but to the sounds of NPR's Robert Segal, not Sonny and Cher. Showered, dressed and eating my bowl of Cheerios at 6:30 a.m. In the car at 6:50 a.m. Same route to work every day, sometimes not remembering most of the trip. Arrive at work at 8:10 a.m. A large mug of Earl Grey tea. Check voicemail, e-mail, and I'm off. Leave work at 4:30 p.m. or so. Get home around 6 p.m. Dinner. Some reading, maybe a movie. Bedtime. Wake up and do it all again.

Sounds like fun, huh? Maybe your routine is a little different, but for the most part if you have a full-time gig at a corporation, chances are you're a creature of habit, feeling like you're on the hamster wheel from hell.

When an injury forces you to slow down because well, basically, you have no choice, it takes time for your system to wind down to a steady idle. It's like driving 90 mph for three hours and then hitting a 20 mph school zone. It's hard to slow down.

When taking our annual family trek down to the Jersey shore in August, it always takes me about four days to flush the routine out of my system. Then, just when I'm relaxed and have forgotten every password and PIN in my head, it's time to leave.

So now that I'm entering week two of my disability leave, I'm feeling less anxious and thinking this could turn out to be a good thing. Why?

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Because it means I have more time to think, dream, plan and laugh—and do nothing. More days unfettered by routine. More quiet time. More time spent observing. It's a chance to clean house and get some Windex on the lens of those antennae. A chance to see less. Feel less. Rest the mind. Feed the soul. Nourish the spirit. And do nothing.

Whether you're a designer, director, actor, executive, whatever, if your everyday responsibilities require you to perform on demand and make magic on a daily basis, then sooner or later you'll be empty. You'll find yourself digging deeper and deeper into your creative well and coming up with less and less.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you go out and break some bones just to get time away from the office. But it would be a good idea to schedule some downtime. Time alone. If you already have a vacation planned and are traveling during your time off, make sure you build in a few extra days before you return to work to do nothing. To lose yourself. To surrender.

It takes time to dissolve the structure from your days until time and schedule have no meaning. Shed your corporate skin. Wear baggier clothes and let the air in. Rediscover your purpose, your essence. The insatiable thirst you once had for creative expression may return, breathing huge breaths to fuel your curiosity. Ideas and thoughts that were previously inaccessible, undeveloped or unrealized will rise to the surface and come into focus like never before.

It's up to you to find ways to keep yourself motivated so you can be in top form when you return to work. No one is going to do it for you. If you're stuck, develop new interests or revisit some old ones. Wander. Wonder. Visit the Area 51 in your mind. Staying inspired takes inspiration.

Well, I've gotta go. I think I see Raymond Burr digging up my neighbor's garden. ☺

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