

## Peer Perspective March 2021

Leisure and the Importance of Enjoyable Activities

by Angela Ahles

“As work weeks get longer and leisure time shrinks, people are becoming sicker, more distracted, absent, unproductive, and less innovative.” -Brigid Schulte (writer, journalist)

I don't know about you but taking time to do the things I love can be a challenge in many aspects for me. The truth is, I start feeling guilty about allotting time for myself. My busy brain says, “you should be doing something constructive” or, “Why aren't you doing laundry instead” and, “Don't you have real things to do?!”. So, I shut down. I will either try to do a chore, or paperwork, or whatnot, instead of something I enjoy doing for leisure such as going for a walk in the park, painting a scene with my acrylics, or playing music on my cello or piano. Then I wonder why I am stressed out and spread too thin.

There are studies of how leisure and recreational activities affect the health of individuals both physically and mentally. Many of these studies are done by various institutions such as the NIH (National Institutes of Health), and most of them go way over my comprehension with the scientific jargon. I could not find any solid statistics like charts and numbers, probably because this is a relatively fresh concept. The NIH paper I read was from 2009, and specifically examined how enjoyable activities are associated with psychological and physiological wellbeing. \*SPOILER ALERT\* The conclusion basically states that enjoyable activities are in fact beneficial to physical and mental wellbeing...go figure 😊

For my physical and mental health I want to take some time this week, even if only for a few hours, to do something I enjoy. I may take a walk, work on an art project or craft, or just spend ten minutes playing with my kitties, but I will not spend that time on wondering whether I am *worth* it or not. That is an exercise for a different day. Instead I will use my skills of Opposite to Emotion Action, and Just Do It (I call it the Nike™ skill...) The reason for this exploration of leisure is my recent discovery (or rather, rediscovery) that one cannot give from an empty basket. What I mean by this is that between much isolation from friends and family, as well as co-workers and the peers I talk to, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some physical health issues I struggle with, and general lack of purposeful decompression- aka leisure time, I was giving more than I was replenishing over the last few months...or even longer. I challenge you to fill your basket by doing some fun activity this week as well!

Whether it's the scientific evidence that you do in fact need a vacation, or you just want a reason to put down the computer for a few minutes and walk around the block on your break, leisure is good for you. Leisure is not synonymous with lazy. “You” time is not selfish. Hobbies are not silly. Enjoy activities you love, in moderation, and you might find yourself improving performance at work, at home, or wherever...and that's great...bonus! By participating and enjoying leisure activities, you are creating a healthy space for your mind and body to exist, and you (yes, me too) are worth that healthy space.

**Fun is about as good a habit as there is. ~Jimmy Buffet**