

What are you doing to keep yourself fresh in thought and frisky in spirit?

Let's face it. The major equipment you bring to your work each day is you. If you're like most of today's workforce, you just may be cooked. Long hours? Late nights? Fire drills out the wazoo? And you're wondering why you aren't accomplishing as much as you expect? In a work world gone mad, days are long and all that brilliant connectivity means we're never unplugged. Planes, trains, and automobiles? Not a problem. Now we can work on our way to work. Whatever happened to the 9-5 day or a real lunch hour?

Here are five things you can do to reclaim your life, renew your spirit and refresh your thinking.

1. Take a vacation, really. This means away - with no cell phones, pagers, or conference calls on the beach. If you are absolutely convinced you can't escape deadlines and meetings, that's a sure sign you need to do it. Wall St Journal columnist Sue Shellenbarger makes a compelling case that "Cutting Work Is Good for You, And Skipping Vacation Can Kill" <http://www.careerjournal.com/columnists/workfamily/20030328-workfamily.html>. And remember, Clarence Birdseye invented frozen food on a fishing vacation in Labrador.

2. Take a field trip. You won't need chaperones, a yellow bus or a squished lunch to get perspective by stepping out into the world. You won't even need a day off. Try a museum at lunchtime, an ethnic neighborhood after work, a midweek concert. Expose yourself to non-work activity during the week and see how restored you feel the next day.

3. Turn off your computer. Pick a time to shut down at the end of the day - and do it. And follow the advice of Verne Harnish, growth company guru, by staying away from e-mail the first 15 minutes of every day. Use that fresh-thinking time to zero in on what's most important. Hear Verne at <http://www.visioninabox.com/vamerica.htm>

4. Serve the community. Choose something meaningful to you - a school, a charity, a person who needs help. If you dedicate one hour a week to a cause greater than your own, you will log 50 hours of "change the world time" at the end of a year. And you will likely be transformed in the process.

5. Keep work in perspective. We can take a lesson from Stephanie Volo, president of non-profit Planet Dog and recognized as one of Fast Company magazine's Fast 50. "Approach business as if you were a dog. Only do things that feel good. Eat enough food. Drink enough water. Get enough sleep. Have enough fun. Woof." Read more at http://www.fastcompany.com/fast50_02/people/culture/volo.html

Concerned that the refresh & renew cycle is too self-indulgent in your high pressured world? Not true. It restores your resilience and frame of mind. So open your calendar - right now - and plan in time to take a break. You and your work will be better for it.