Making Summer Fun Again

Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO

"I think we need to remind ourselves to occasionally take the time to relax and enjoy the summer"
-Anna Wells

I am the middle child of three, in between two boys—all of us quite close in age. When we were kids, our parents had us firmly limited to a half an hour of television per day, even on summer vacation. I usually went with "The Cosby Show."
This left us countless school-less hours at our disposal, much of which we spent outdoors playing sports, building things, and tearing things apart. I can't even fathom how much time in my life I must have spent playing home run derby.

Now that I'm an adult with a career, I still struggle in the late spring. It feels like there ought to be a gap where I should be able to leisurely unwind as the weather heats—wasting days on my balcony reading the newspaper, watching the birds. Sadly, as adults we typically don't have the luxury of summers that are endless barbecues and poker games.

Since my office is bordered with giant windows, the first few perfectly sunny afternoons have been torture. My productivity tends to dip slightly on these days, when I'm sitting in front of my computer, paned in by glass, listening to the drone of the air conditioner. But if you asked me when my next vacation was, I'd tell you I don't have time.

I think being driven to be successful and motivated in our jobs is an admirable quality. Still, the more I reflect on my attitude towards work, the more I find wrong with it. When did time off become such a liability? Work-related stress has been

known to cause increased illness, irritability, disrupted sleeping patterns, as well as a slew of cognitive problems such as difficulty concentrating or making decisions. It's all too common that these issues are followed by increased absenteeism, higher turnover, and higher heath care costs. It appears maybe it's not enough time off that's the real liability.

How often do any of us really take a break? I'd say it's a pretty fair guess that there are more than a few of us out there with our Blackberries within arm's reach on the night stand when we go to sleep. As plant managers, being on call is part of the business, but this doesn't mean you can't occasionally take your lunch outside to the picnic tables, or take a lap around the building when the sun is out.

I think we need to remind ourselves to occasionally take the time to relax and enjoy the summer—there are many ways to optimize the outdoors without hampering productivity. Last week I spent my lunch break hitting golf balls and came back to the office refreshed. It's not home run derby, but if you ask me, it's a pretty good compromise.

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