

Can Leisure Bring Work-Related Benefits?

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How should entrepreneurs spend their time to enhance their effectiveness? Conventional wisdom would suggest that they must dedicate almost the entirety of their time and effort at work to breathe life into their ventures, but we found otherwise.

Life in a new venture is stressful work. Entrepreneurs must invest significant time and effort into their ventures to navigate uncertain environments with frequent setbacks. Because of this, entrepreneurs tend to have an intense compulsion to work, often being labeled as “workaholics.” Despite this, entrepreneurs also have a tremendous amount of flexibility in structuring their lives. Yet the focus is typically on entrepreneurs’ work lives, thus overlooking another important aspect of their lives: their leisure.

In our research, we wanted to understand how entrepreneurs can intentionally and proactively structure their leisure time -- a process called leisure crafting -- to overcome stress and obtain work-related benefits. How can cultivating interests that promote learning outside of work help entrepreneurs deal with stress? How can this structuring of their leisure time impact their work?

We explored these questions by surveying 258 entrepreneurs using established scientific measures. Our survey results told us that when entrepreneurs focused on crafting their leisure, they got better at managing stress and generating novel and creative ideas at work.

A Proactive Pursuit

What does leisure crafting look like and why is it helpful? Leisure crafting means intentionally choosing leisure activities that encourage goal achievement, human connection, learning, and personal development. Unlike passive leisure (e.g., watching TV or sleeping), leisure crafting involves a serious and intentional structuring of one’s leisure with the goal of detaching from work, finding new challenges, developing new and inspiring connections, and obtaining novel skills and knowledge.

For example, entrepreneurs might decide to read more books, learn a new language, or attend classes or seminars, all of which may improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities. They might participate in social activities that let them meet new people and bounce ideas off them, and discover new information and diverse perspectives in the process. All of activities help entrepreneurs detach from work, become re-energized, and gather new ideas that help them be more creative when they’re back on the job.

Final Thoughts

We certainly don’t advise that entrepreneurs focus entirely on their leisure at the expense of their work. They still need to work hard to be creative and generate ideas for their business. Instead, we are suggesting that entrepreneurs should allocate a portion of their time for leisure crafting. Specifically, when faced with work stress, entrepreneurs should step away from work rather than digging in. They should proactively engage in a leisure activity that helps them re-energize and reset before attempting to resolve these stressors. Finally, even people who are not entrepreneurs can benefit from taking breaks from work to recover, socialize, and master new skills. Proactively structuring leisure -- and focusing on personal development and learning outside of work -- can help anyone do better work.

Explore the Research

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