

The Discipline of Doing Nothing
Formerly: Developing the Discipline of Doing Nothing

You cannot pour from an empty cup.
~Author Unknown

I can't think of any benefits of this pandemic, but if there was one, it might be how it forced me to slow down. Eventually, I will return to the rat race with all its demands and deadlines. But I hope I never forget the one lesson I learned: to consciously "insert pauses" into my day by developing the discipline of doing nothing.

Many years ago, Coca-Cola ran a brilliant advertising campaign about "The Pause That Refreshes." They were on to something. Pauses refresh us because they allow us to stop, refocus, and rest.

The older I get, the more I've intentionally inserted pauses into my day. Some pauses are only a few minutes long; others are hours. It may be a walk to a faraway copier at work instead of the one in my department. Or driving an alternate route home. Or a day at the beach. The idea is to relax, rejuvenate, and rest by diverting my thoughts from what stresses me to what refreshes me.

Rest replenishes us. And I rest best by, well, doing nothing. I recently read a little book by Sandy Gingras called *How to Live at the Beach*. I love this lighthearted, five-minute read. It's a metaphor that conjures up images of the mentality we have when we're at the beach—and why we need to transport this beach mentality to our non-beach lives.

My son, his wife, and my grandson live near the beach in Santa Barbara, California. Next to Hawaii, it's one of the most beautiful places in the United States. When I head to the ocean with them, I'm awed by the benefits of the beach. It invites us to a state of serenity and calls us to a life of simplicity.

The beach near their home is where I naturally reduce speed and forget about the complexity of the world. The beach may be the only place where I can return to my child-like self by building sandcastles with my grandson or sitting in the surf and letting the waves massage me or float me like a piece of driftwood.

For me, a day at the beach epitomizes the discipline of doing nothing. It's a pause. A prototype of a simpler life. I'm learning how to bring a beach mentality, and all its benefits, back home with me. A beach mentality slows me down, allows me to ponder only what's in front of me, diffuses stress, and allows me to fully appreciate what surrounds me in my nine-to-five world.

During this time of "country closure" (and doing nothing), I've noticed what I typically fail to notice, some of which is in my own back yard: the graceful arc of a hawk; the song of the cardinal, red-winged blackbird, blue jay, robin, or killdeer; the power and precision of the red-headed woodpecker; the wobbly legs of a newborn fawn; the majesty of a doe up close; and the artistic curl of an ocean wave just before it breaks at the shore. Ironically, I notice more when I "invest the time" to do nothing. Who says doing nothing is boring? Doing nothing calms, recalibrates, enlightens, and refuels me.

I've realized that by pausing more, I've seen more, listened more, heard more, and felt more. Yet, pausing is a discipline all its own. It's much more difficult to slow down than speed up.

By developing the discipline of doing nothing, I've learned that a life of clarity,
simplicity, and rest awaits.
It's like a day at the beach.

—James C. Magruder—

