

**Your Mind on Media Newsletter:
Productive Relaxation—These Breaks Will Make You Smarter
(c) Joanne Cantor, Ph.D., October 23, 2012**

These days everyone seems to be a workaholic. Even if we're not multitasking, we seem to be working nonstop and bouncing from one activity to another without even time to catch our breath. We think we need to do this because there's so much to do and so little time. And yet, more and more research is emerging that shows that breaks from work are essential to working effectively. Here are some recommendations that come out of this research:

1. **Take a brief resting break after learning something new.** A recent study showed that people who took a 10-minute resting break after hearing a story remembered it better after a week than people who immediately switched to a new task. So, after reading, hearing, or watching something you want to remember, give those new ideas some time to consolidate in your memory before moving on.
2. **Cut your studying or practicing into manageable chunks with breaks in between.** Research shows you make much more progress with the same amount of work if you take breaks in between shorter periods of intense activity than if you power through in a solid chunk of time.
3. **Walk around during your break and/or get some fresh air.** This brings more oxygen to your brain and restores your flagging attention.
4. **Walk, run, ride, or drive somewhere without the radio on and without other electronic input.** Even if the quiet lasts for only a few minutes, ideas that you've recently heard about will have time to settle in.
5. **If you're working at home, wash the dishes or take a shower during your break.** You'll be amazed what good ideas emerge when you're not trying to think about your work.
6. **Take a nap if you're feeling burnt out on a project.** Sleep doesn't just help consolidate memories; relaxing your brain lets creative connections emerge that might not come to you when your attention is too tightly focused.

The good news is that you don't need to be consciously thinking of the work you're taking a break from to receive these benefits--they occur automatically and unconsciously. But the important thing is **not to be gathering new information** during your break. There's a definite limit to your brain's information-processing capacity. So after reading a report, attending a meeting, or hearing a lecture, control that impulse to immediately check messages, news updates, or Facebook postings. Wait a few minutes and benefit from your brain's enhanced ability to digest what's new.

Want to know more about the value of brief resting breaks?
See my latest post in Psychology Today:

"How to Succeed without Really Trying:
Relaxation Makes You Smarter"
(see the link on this Resources page)

Recent Sightings

In the News:

Maclean's (Canada)
"Women Shouldn't Read This Article:
Negative News Stories Affect Stress (But Not for Men)"

Metro Kids (Philadelphia)
"I'll get you my pretty! For centuries, scary stories have prepared kids for the real world."

WISC-TV (Madison, WI)
Interview about the effects of hostile political advertisements on children

For these and other Media Sightings, see my "In the News" page.

Recent Speaking Clients:

Madison Area Business Consultants
Wisconsin College Personnel Association
Communication Arts Partners
Student Affairs 101 Conference

This past month, I've spoken to company presidents, business consultants, college personnel, and college students, and I've received lots of reports of the difficulties people are having managing their digital distractions and much appreciation for my tips and advice. One attendee, a global communications strategist, said,

"This is so helpful! I've been going about everything the wrong way. I've got to change my habits."

The head of an Internet company said,

"Your presentation yesterday has set me in motion to 'cure' myself. So starting today I am really working at this and I'm going to keep at it every single day."

The head of a PR Firm told me,

"I especially found your advice on promoting creativity to be eye-opening and helpful."

Making These Ideas Work for You

Looking for tips for doing higher quality work in less time while reducing stress and burnout? My entertaining and memorable presentations are both original and helpful in providing easily adopted strategies for individuals, organizations, and corporations.

The people in your business, association, or school can benefit from my keynotes and workshops. Email or call me (608-221-0593) to learn about how we can help them succeed and thrive in the Internet age. Or go to the Speaking section of my website to explore the various programs I can offer on increasing productivity, maximizing creativity, and reducing stress. And check out the recent video on my Home Page.