

Creative procrastination

Robyn Pearce on the art of slowing down

You've had your big summer holidays and are probably back at work thinking, "Is there anything I can do differently this year so I'm not so exhausted at the end of a term?"

My quick answer – be a better procrastinator. You thought procrastination was a naughty word, didn't you? You're only partly right.

Negative procrastination – putting off until tomorrow that which should be done today – is an energy-sapper. It occurs when we allow trivia to block us from having a fulfilled, happy and productive life.

On the other hand, *creative* procrastination is good. I love explaining it – it's like telling people that sometimes chocolate and ice-cream are actually good for you! It is deliberate – pushing back on low-level tasks in order to stay focused on higher-value activities.

(You might like this definition from my first book *Getting A Grip On Time*):

Creative procrastination is putting off until tomorrow that which won't advance your life plan by being done today.

It's the planned and deliberate gift of prime time to yourself regularly, doing what gives you greatest satisfaction, including doing nothing if that's your choice.

And it's also learning how to leave undone those things which didn't really need to be done, so that you achieve balance and satisfaction in your life.

We have been brought up to regard "doing nothing" as bad. Is it? How about adopting a new paradigm about "think and "play time"?

I recently re-read an interview from 2005 by *Observer* journalist Sean O'Hagan and British psychoanalyst and writer Adam Phillips, author of *Going Sane*. Phillips has a refreshingly different perspective.

Here are a few excerpts from the interview.

Phillips: "One of the best things we could do as individuals is allow ourselves to daydream more."

O'Hagan: "In this belief, of course, [Phillips] is in direct conflict with the thrust of our culture, which is geared to ever more activity; longer hours, more multi-tasking, always the need to keep up, or run at full pelt to try and catch up."

Phillips: "One of the more distracting things about capitalist culture is that there is no stupor, no time to vegetate. What I would suggest is more time wasting, less stimulation. We need time to lie fallow like we did in childhood, so we can recuperate."

O'Hagan: "It seems to be dawning on us that,



although our lives are easier – that is to say, less poor, less threatened by disease and death, less prescribed by class, gender or race than the lives of our parents or our grandparents – they are nevertheless more *pointlessly complex* and, as a result, we seem to be more unhappy. That unhappiness manifests itself... in a strange dissatisfaction with ourselves, and in our ability to be, for want of a better word, contented."

You'll find the full interview at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/feb/13/booksonhealth.lifeandhealth>

These guys made sense to me and I'm sure you've also noticed the same paradox – that material wealth for many equals time-poverty and constant discontent. Just because we *can* fit more in doesn't mean we should.

Here's a question for reflection: How can we make life simpler and enjoy it more?

A few thought-starters:

- 1 Before taking on another commitment: "Does this fit with the life I choose to live?"
- 2 Are you saying "no" to enough things?
- 3 When you're about to buy yet another 'thing', stop and ask, "Is this item going to make my life richer, or will it just make life more crowded and complicated? Is it a 'need' or a 'want'? Will it quickly become clutter?"
- 4 Did you review your goals over the holidays? No time like the present if you haven't! (If you'd like help on goal-setting, see my article 'Why should people set goals?' <http://www.gettingagrip.com/articles/articles/16/118/>)
- 5 Is there anything else you can do to simplify your life? For example, what can you give away, recycle, throw away?

- 6 Are you blocking free weekends into the diary now – no commitments – every 4–6 weeks?

And here are three actions that might be helpful:

- 7 Turn off the TV. Don't let it dominate your evenings. What messages are you putting in your sub-conscious just before sleep? (This is very easy for me – I hardly watch any TV).
- 8 Give your mind time to slow down before you sleep. (Voracious reader though I am, I rarely read business books at night – they wire me up too much. Before bed is novel reading time – a delicious treat.)
- 9 It may seem like a contradiction, but 'plan' to do nothing. Make sure you've left 'fallow' time in your week, every week, and hopefully every day.

Less is more

Have an awesome 2013, and if you'd like some time management training on PD or Teacher Only Days, I will be working in some Australian schools this year. Just drop a line to robyn@gettingagrip.com or call +64 275 846 348. **ET**



Robyn Pearce helps exhausted overloaded teachers find more time, control their paperwork and get home earlier. www.gettingagrip.com.

She is a Certified Speaking Professional (top speaking accreditation in the profession of speaking) held by only about 800 people around the world.