

The Counselor's Corner

To Do or Not to Do?

Recently, a friend of mine was experiencing some excruciating pain. He had to stop working and go on disability. He found it difficult to stay at home with nothing to do. So, he did laundry. Some new parents can't wait for their babes to take naps, so they can catch up on housework. A 90+ year old woman complains about sleeping too much. Others use vacation days to either work around the house or fill their days with social engagements. Many of us cannot stand to be still. It seems that we sometimes choose a path that is the opposite of what we require. We need to sleep, we need to heal, but we **do not need** to justify our actions and inactions to ourselves or others.

I recently read an article called "The Way Out of Burnout" by Josh Cohen, psychoanalyst. Even though most of us advocate using "to do" lists, Cohen says that "the nervous exhaustion of burnout results from ... **enslavement** to an endless to-do list with short and long range tasks". In other words, we make detailed lists on top of lists and we delude ourselves into thinking that we are not admirable people when we do not get all of our tasks done. Instead, we should recognize that we are people of free will who can and must choose to detour off our rigid paths to enjoy the simple things in life.

One of Cohn's patients was caught in a 'Catch 22' situation. He was "too drained to work, and unable to rest". This patient did not know how to simply do "nothing". He had to try to learn through therapy sessions. He viewed inactivity as a sign of laziness. He berated himself for not being as productive as he could have been. Cohn says that his patient was "seeing himself from the perspective of a culture that looks with disdain at anything that smacks of inactivity."

Doing nothing every day is not good, but doing nothing at times is great. It regenerates us, and it lets us live in the moment. Like many, Cohn recommends yoga and meditation. Others find relaxation and renewal in prayer. Ditching the to-do lists at times empowers us to relax and know what is really important. Perhaps we can sit on our porches and admire Nature, watch a movie with family, or sit in a room with only the light of a candle.

Someday, we will leave our to-do lists behind. No one will finish them. No one will care. Instead, they will relish in telling stories about the times we relaxed, got silly, and had fun with them.

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