

Huffington

Life Balance: Include Time for Play



“How much does this glass of water weigh?” she asked.

“Eight ounces,” someone said.

“Twelve ounces,” suggested someone else.

The guessing continued and answers ranged up to twenty ounces. The young woman with the glass just smiled. She was making a point in her presentation about stress management at a trade show and conference I was attending.

“It doesn’t really matter how much this little glass of water weighs, does it?” said the presenter. “It’s not very heavy and I can hold it fine. A more important question might be, ‘How long do I have to hold it?’ If I hold it a minute, no problem. But if I have to hold it for an hour, it’s a different proposition. It will be painful.”

The presenter clinched her point by saying that that’s how it is with stress. She said that if we carry our burdens with us all the time, sooner or later, as the load becomes increasingly heavy, we will burn out.

“As with the glass of water, we have to find ways to set the stress down once in a while.”

I thought about what the presenter had said as I made my way across the floor of the trade show. I overheard people greeting each other. Many of them had not seen each other since last year at the show.

“How have you been?” someone said. And the response was inevitably a variation of the same thought, “I’ve been crazy busy. It has just been insane with so much going on.”

There is no question that we are all living our lives at a frantic pace. And we begin early on. A friend of mine says she picks up her two children from elementary school at 3:30 p.m. and then begins what she calls “second shift” consisting of soccer, piano, and swimming lessons.

But maybe in this instance we can learn something from our kids, the masters of playtime. One simple yet powerful antidote to working ourselves to death is “play.”

Play on a regular basis is not only healthy but wise to help set aside our worries, renew our energy, and increase our focus.

Dr. Stuart Brown, a medical doctor, psychiatrist and clinical researcher, states unequivocally in his book *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*:

The ability to play is critical not only to being happy, but also to sustaining social relationships and being a creative and innovative person. ...

I don't think it is too much to say that play can save your life. ... Life without play is a grinding, mechanical existence organized around doing things necessary for survival. Play is the stick that stirs the drink. ... Play is the vital essence of life. It is what makes life lively.

Watch Dr. Brown's discussion, “Play Is More Than Just Fun,” on TED.

Stress is like a violin. If the strings are too loose we get no music. If they are too tight the strings will break. We must all find the right balance between work and our personal life. Integrating your own choice of play into your life can help you achieve balance. But you will have to leave the time for play, not make it an afterthought. You might just have to put it on your calendar.