



life inspiration

your own sweet time

Feeling overwhelmed?
Make a break for it,
says a guru of renewal.

BY KATHY ENGLISH

As the calendar officially marks the beginning of autumn, management consultant Patricia Katz will be on the road north from her Saskatoon home to a lakeside cabin in the boreal forest of Northern Saskatchewan. She'll spend an entire day there with two friends, women like herself who are searching for serenity amidst do-it-all lifestyles that leave little time for reflection. For seven years now Katz and her friends have booked at least half a day at the turn of each season doing something together for themselves – a long walk, a pedicure, a picnic – to reflect on what Katz calls their “screw-ups and suc-

cesses” in their quests for balance in their respective lives. “We’ve all benefitted so much from this practice,” she says. “It’s helped all three of us focus our lives.”

For Katz, a woman who deftly juggles several roles – being a mother, wife, writer, consultant – those days of relaxation and renewal are an opportunity to practice what she preaches: the value of giving ourselves a break from constantly being busy. As a time-management and organizational skills consultant, Katz, 51, knows every time-management trick in the book. But after 17 years of helping hundreds of people set priorities, make lists, organize their day- >

books and maximize their hours, she’s come to believe that what we need most is to give ourselves what she calls permission to pause, an old idea that seems radically new in this hurried world we’ve created – what our great-grandparents might have called taking time to smell the roses.

Pausing is simple, says Katz. You simply take a break from what you’re doing and step back to rest, think or feel, whether it’s for a minute, an afternoon, a long weekend or more. It might be a two-minute break in the midst of a task, a short walk at lunch or an afternoon of mindful puttering. What’s the benefit? It restores your perspective, sparks your insight, sustains your spirit and conserves your energy, adding up to more joy and satisfaction as well as more stamina, says

Katz, a longtime multi-tasker who has written three books on time management, obtained her master’s degree in continuing education and built up her business – all while raising her daughters, now 23 and 18, and nurturing her marriage of 29 years.

When Katz was working on her master’s project, she was introduced to a concept called “time starvation” – the feeling that we will never have enough time to accomplish all we want.

“If we wait until we are caught up before taking a break, we will run at high speed, flat out for the rest of our lives. The only relief is what we claim for ourselves,” says Katz, who delivers this message in management seminars across the country. That’s right: bosses pay her to tell their employees to slow down and take breaks. “All the emphasis on production, progress, efficiency, goal-setting and achievement are positive in themselves, but only sustainable if we take time for renewal,” she says. “The world won’t fall apart, and we can actually get some satisfaction in what we are doing.”

A Break from Busyness

Balance booster Patricia Katz offers these guidelines to fit pause time into your busy life.

Micro-pauses take seconds. Simply stop whatever you’re doing. Take a deep breath. Exhale slowly and move on.

Mini-pauses take minutes. Coffee breaks are mini-pauses, but too often we don’t bother. Bathroom breaks are, too, so drink more water and take that break. Stretch. Change your focus.

Maxi-pauses take hours. Play hooky for an afternoon. Visit the museum. Browse around a bookstore. Go sailing. Dance. Do whatever it is that recharges you.

Macro-pauses take days – maybe many. Go on a vacation. Disconnect from voice mail, e-mail and colleagues. Consider a sabbatical. –K.E.

For more ideas check out Katz’s Web site: www.patkatz.com.

Katz believes the consequences of a world with no downtime are life-sapping – less patience and energy, more stress and anxiety, all leading to fatigue, depression and burnout. It’s the permission part that most of us struggle with, she says. We live in a hurried world where we wear our busyness like badges of honour. We multi-task to our heart’s discontent because we’ve bought into the notion that doing is superior to simply being.

Sometimes, the first person she needs to advise to pause is herself. “I struggle with this all the time because I love what I do, so I’ve had to create boundaries that help me live a more balanced life,” she says. To keep herself on track daily, she has a 30-to 60-minute-long morning ritual where she might go for a walk along the river near her home, practise yoga, meditate, read or write in her journal.

Katz shares her philosophy in an e-mail newsletter she sends free to several thousand people throughout North America. Called *Pause – The Voice of Sanity in a Speed-Crazed World*, the newsletter arrives in e-mail boxes each week “midway between Monday’s expectations and Friday’s frustrations” offering points to ponder such as: If life is a race, does the person who dies win first?

“I know my message is making a difference in people’s lives,” she says. “Subscribers write to me every week, often telling me it’s as if I told them exactly what they needed to hear.”

And that is it, in one form or another? “Wherever you are at this very minute, pause,” she says. “Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Open your eyes and take a long, slow look around you. Make a mental list of what you see at this moment – and if you see a rose, smell it!” H