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360 Orchard Road, #06-08 International Building, Singapore 238869
6734 6463 • www.intlcounselling.com • connect@intlcounselling.com

1. Take a vacation – seems simple enough, right? Consider a three-day weekend, a one-week vacation or a 10-day trip. All have been considered “optimal” vacation times for decreasing stress and burnout. Disconnect from work and go somewhere that will allow you to stop ruminative thinking. Consider spending more time with a friend or loved one or be more adventurous and try to accomplish a fitness goal such as hiking a mountain, running a race, or attending a new festival.

2. Staycation – don’t have time to leave the country? Feel that it is too much planning? Try exploring Singapore with your own schedule or going to the events that range from food and drinks, to concerts, to cultural events. Consider staying in a comfortable hotel away from the house or treating yourself to a special dinner at a new restaurant.

Visit Singapore’s website at www.visitsingapore.com provides useful listings of what’s going on in and around town.

3. Weekends – Relax at home with some good food and drinks with a favorite or a new recipe. Consider getting involved with sports, a food group, book club, or any other interest you have. Spend the weekend doing what is familiar and enjoyable or try joining a new group as a beginner to expand your social scene.

Take a Break Before You're Broken

By Alan Cromlish

The workplace can be a source of stress for many people. Feelings of being overwhelmed, an indifferent or lack of interest and feelings of inadequacy are common symptoms of too much stress at work. If these persist, it could lead to eventual burnout or worse. A recent study found that over 120,000 deaths in the US are associated with workplace stress and this would make it on par with stroke and Alzheimer's, the fourth and fifth largest causes of death in the US. The supporting facts do not make it any better. “Job insecurity increased the odds of reporting poor health by 50%, while long work hours increased mortality by almost 20%. Additionally, highly demanding jobs raised the odds of a physician-diagnosed illness by 35%.” Singapore’s Ministry of Manpower reports that, on average, workers log 45 hours a week, the highest among member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and that 72% of Singapore employers believe stress and mental health are a concern.

Our jobs and the workplace play a significant role in our lives and they are often associated with our identity. Jobs and our activities help provide meaning, socialization and engagement. However, unfortunately, the local and global problems of workplace stress can have lasting impacts on us physically, mentally and socially. Having feelings of burnout at work caused by perceived inadequacy, feeling overwhelmed, or just too much stress will slowly wear an individual down if a location and job are associated with strong negative feelings.

With jobs traditionally taking place Monday to Friday, research carried out has studied the relationship between our emotions and the days of the week. The Monday to Friday workweek is a mix of emotions that depends on how much you enjoy your job and if you are engaged after work, but the biggest change is the weekend. The weekends are greater associated with happiness, enjoyment and laughter. This ‘weekend effect’ helps explain why researchers came to the seemingly obvious conclusion that weekdays are a lot less fun than the weekends.

The two biggest cited reasons for the increase in these positive emotions on the weekend are because of a well-deserved break from work and an increase in well-being, specifically engaging in more social activities and enhancing relationships. First, full-time workers are happier than those who are unemployed. While this does enhance well-being for a number of reasons, it allows individuals to work hard during the week and enjoy a deserved break for at least two full days. Second, the weekends allow for more time to be spent with friends and family as well as to be involved in more activities. With chores, sleep and work taking up bulk portions of the work week, it can be difficult to give some of the remaining time to activities and those that are not close to your daily routine, work or home. The weekend frees up a large block of time and provides the individuals the opportunity to increase their well-being.

While the ‘weekend effect’ does offer individuals more positive emotions and an opportunity to increase their well-being, vacations can do the same. A vacation provides the opportunity to disconnect from the routine and from work. It offers time to relax your mind and stop stressing. More importantly, vacations have been linked with more sleep, more physical activities, more social activities and less obligatory engagements which allow people to be stress free. Additionally, the physical distance from the house and work provides the extra benefit of providing people the physical and mental distance from the everyday and work-related stresses.

With the holiday season upon us, take the time to let go of work and utilize the break. Empower yourself and know how to maximize your leisure time.

Whatever you choose, leave the thoughts of work and stress behind. While there are many choices in how to spend one’s free time and vacations, it is more important to spend that time with friends and loved ones and focus on improving relationships.

Alan Cromlish is a doctoral student at the University of Southern California where he works with a Finnish university on student health and wellness. He previously worked in South Korea as a professor of education and was the program director within the Global Educational Institute. He moved to Singapore with his wife after being relocated and continues his doctoral work.

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