

Relax! It's Your Key to Success — and it Could Save Your Life ***(Mini Vacations)***

John has a very busy life. He has a wife and two young children of six and seven years old, and a toy manufacturing company, which he started four years ago. It is doing well, but John is facing a lot of competition from other manufacturers, and has trouble holding on to his employees. He works six days a week for up to twelve hours a day.

When he gets home, he is tired but has trouble unwinding from the pressures of the day. His wife Mary immediately starts telling him about her trouble with John's mother, who is living with them in their small home. The children also want his attention, asking him to play with them or help them with their homework. He snaps at the children to leave him alone and orders them to go to their rooms and study. His wife continues to complain about his mother-in-law. She wants John to take her side and tell his mother to quit criticizing her, and he argues that she should be more filial to his mother and try to get along with her. He walks over to a cabinet to get a bottle of wine, and pours himself a big drink.

By supper time he is feeling the effects of the alcohol, and eats his meal too quickly, while constantly checking his WeChat messages from his employees, and other associates. He yells at the children when they make too much noise, his face turning bright red and his hand slamming the table a number of times. Finally he gets up from the table and leaves the house to go meet some friends and play Ma Jong.

He gets home before midnight, drunk. He has a sore stomach and smells of cigarettes. Mary is awake and angry at him, but pretends to be asleep. Actually she does not sleep well, and usually lays awake for hours until she

finally gets a few hours before facing another day. Often she will phone her mother or sister and tell them about her problems with the marriage, about the pressure she's under from her mother-in-law's demands and criticisms, about her worries concerning their financial situation (John often loses at Ma Jong), and her anxiety over her children's performance at school. Neither boy is in the top third of their class, and she is afraid they will never make it to a good university, and will end up like her brother, Michael.

Michael is almost thirty years old, and works in John's factory, running an assembly machine, and working as a night-time janitor there to make some extra money. The pay is low, and the work is not very interesting to Michael, but he can't afford to leave his job, and does not know what else he could do with his life. His diet consists mostly of fast food, coffee, and sweets. He lives alone because he does not feel he is worthy of a partner, and spends his free time playing video games, which are usually violent and very stimulating to Michael. On his one day off, he usually sleeps until three or four in the afternoon, and spends the rest of his time playing video games.

Like many people, John, Mary and Michael are so busy just trying to survive that they are not aware of the pressure and strain they are under.

First of all, let's look at your checklist for the day. Getting to places on time, improving your study or work performance, making sure the family is well provided for, and that there's enough money in the bank, etc. Are you anxious to achieve your goals of success and financial gain? Do you feel

pressure when you think about work, money, family or finances? How about relaxation? Have you left any time for relaxation?

It's hard to believe, but if you want to succeed in your life, relaxation is just as important as hard work. Not only that, relaxation is a major factor in your health, as well as an important influence on your intimate relationship and family life. This is because when you are not relaxed, your body is under stress, which causes hormones to be constantly put into your blood stream, affecting your brain, nervous system, digestion, breathing and heart rate. When under stress your body and mind can become disconnected from people and your environment.

It's not enough to take vacations once a year; you need small vacations every day in order to give your body a chance to enjoy a sense of chemical, mental and emotional balance. Many people think relaxation is a luxury they are too busy to enjoy, but in fact relaxation is an absolute necessity if you want to enjoy a productive and prosperous life.

At first it might be hard to learn how to relax, because your body has developed the habit of remaining in a stressful state. Even your mind will convince you that you shouldn't stop and that you don't have the time to relax. You have to keep going, going, going! Worries about money, work performance, your children or other possible objects of concern, can make you feel very tense and inaccessible to others, and this tension may be hard to loosen up. Let's look at three aspects of your physical being that can prevent you from truly relaxing:

- **Shallow Breathing:** If you look at the way babies breathe you will notice that their breaths extend into their bellies. People who are under stress usually breathe only to their solar plexus, and many people's breaths are even shallower than that. Learning to breathe

fully is an essential aspect to your daily “mini vacations”. This is where meditation and relaxation techniques have proven to be extremely helpful.

- **Muscle tightness:** Many of us are so used to holding tension in our muscles and joints that we go through our entire day without noticing how tight our jaws, shoulders, chest and stomach muscles are. Therefore we need to practice dropping our shoulders loosening our jaws and consciously relaxing our chest, stomach and other areas where we tend to hold on too tightly. Exercise and relaxation techniques combine to be effective stress releasers for the physical body.
- **The anxious mind:** It’s been estimated that the average human being has 50,000 thoughts per day, many of which actually maintain the pressure we put on ourselves. An anxious mind is constantly living in the future and worrying about what could happen. Most of the time it worries about things that never come about. Consciously directing our thoughts towards peace and tranquility and bringing the attention back to what’s happening now will relieve stress almost instantly.

We hope that you will remember to take “mini vacations” throughout your day. Relax and breathe and just simply notice any tension you may feel in your body. Very little effort is required.... most relaxation takes place by simply noticing.

Mini Vacations: These simple exercises can be done anywhere. We suggest you practice one mini vacation exercise a day as many times as you

can, so that you can become aware of how deeply relaxing each one can be. Although it's easier to concentrate in a quiet place, you can do most of these exercises even in a noisy restaurant, or on a crowded bus.

1. Clench your right fist tightly, as tight as you can and hold it for ten seconds. Notice other areas of your body that become tense or tight as you clench tightly. Then relax your hand and enjoy the pleasant feeling of relaxation in your hand, your shoulder and chest, and those other tensed up areas. Then clench your left hand tightly, as tight as you can. Hold it for ten seconds and notice other areas of your body that become tense or tight as you clench tightly. Then relax your hand and enjoy the pleasant feeling of relaxation in your hand, shoulder and chest, and those other tensed up areas. At least five minutes at a time is suggested for this exercise, but even twenty seconds will provide you with a sense of relaxation.

2. Sit comfortably and scan your body for any tightness or tension. Pay special attention to your jaw, shoulders, stomach and buttocks. When you find a tight spot, count slowly backwards from ten. With each number watch the tightness melt into a relaxed state.

3. Take a moment to notice your breathing, but don't change it. First just notice how deeply your breath is going into your body. Then invite a gentle breath through your nose and down into your belly. Notice your belly slowly expand, and then watch it contract as you exhale. Count as you inhale softly all the way into your belly, and exhale to the same count. You can do this exercise for ten seconds or ten minutes. Your complete concentration is more important than the time you invest in these exercises.

4. (This one might be better to do privately). Sitting comfortably, let your jaw drop open as far as it can go. Don't force it — simply let it drop gently open as far as it wants to go. As you do this, notice your shoulders also want to drop into a more relaxed position. You can even let them drop down by your side. Notice that your breathing naturally becomes deeper and flows into your belly. If it's possible, you can even make a sighing sound as you relax.

5. Although this exercise is more suitable for lying on the floor or in bed, it can be effective while sitting. This is a gravity exercise. While in whatever position you choose, imagine that you could feel the force of gravity pulling you toward the center of the earth, causing you to feel heavier and heavier, your body sinking deeper into the chair or bed. Let your body feel pulled down by the gravitational force, and as this happens, imagine the gravity pulling all the stress and tightness out of your body into the earth. Count slowly backwards from ten down to zero, and with each number you feel the gravity more strongly, your body becoming heavier and the stress flowing out more and more. You can end this exercise by counting forward from one to ten, noticing your body feeling lighter with every count. Take at least a minute for this exercise if you can, but even twenty seconds would benefit you if you give it your full attention and concentration.

Meditation

(Introduction) In order to dissolve the stress and tension in your life, it is important to pay greater attention to your body, since this is where we hold our stress. We will help you do this in two ways, beginning with a meditation, followed by an invitation to pay closer attention to your physical sense of hearing.

For this and all future meditations, you are asked to turn your phone off and put it in another room. This is a meditation designed to help you attune to your body more so that you can notice if stressful energy is building up inside you...

(Begin music with sound of water, or just water)

- You can sit or lie down and relax into a comfortable position... allowing the concerns and pressures of your day to dissolve... release... and relax...

- Notice the rhythm of your breath... going in... and out of your body...

- Notice how your breath gently flows into your belly ...and gently flows out again... breathing in relaxation... and exhaling unnecessary stress or tension... in peace and relaxation... out stress and tension

- ... now I invite you to place your hand over your heart... pay attention to that area of your body... notice any sensations that might be there...physical sensations... or energy sensations... whatever sensation or feeling you experience is perfectly fine... even numbness is perfect... simply notice whatever is there...

-If there is any tension or tightness... or discomfort of any kind... allow a smooth, relaxing breath into that space... and through it into your belly... then exhale the tension out...

-... now place your hand over your solar plexus... notice any sensations or feelings in that part of your body...

-notice what you're experiencing there... even if the sensation is very subtle or faint... just notice it there...

-If there is any tension or tightness... or discomfort of any kind... allow a smooth, relaxing breath into that space... and through it into your belly... then exhale the tension out...

-Now you're invited to place your hand just below your bellybutton... pay attention to that area of your body... notice any sensations that might be there... physical sensations... or energy sensations... whatever sensation or feeling you experience is perfectly fine... even numbness is perfect... simply notice whatever is there...

-If there is any tension or tightness... or discomfort of any kind... allow a smooth, relaxing breath into that space... and through it into your belly... then exhale the tension out...

-Notice how relaxed you feel now... enjoy this moment... let your body absorb the peace and tranquility you feel...

-Listen to the sound of the water... feel that smooth, liquid sound flowing into your ears... just listen... (1 or 2 minutes of client listening to the water.)

-... take your time... when you are ready... you can open your eyes, rise up from your position... and in a relaxed manner... go on with your day...

For the next half hour, pay close attention to sounds, no matter what those sounds are. Whether it's the sound of traffic, or people talking, an air conditioning fan or a bird singing. Wherever you are, simply listen.