



Scientific research has added new depths to the act of delving deep into the realms of the subconscious; it has proven how zoning out benefits one's creativity and well-being.

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Give yourself a 'brain break'

A fire without fuel burns out. It does not matter how much you blow or waft, without firewood to keep the flames going, it will inevitably regress to nothing more than blackened embers. What does this have to do with taking a brain break, you ask? Well, in the simplest of terms, our minds operate much like a fire. If we keep on burning and burning without stopping to refuel, then we will eventually run out of energy. Not only is this bad for our work, it is bad for overall well-being, too. Maintaining a flow of creative ideas, executing good work, and keeping your brain in tip-top shape might sound like an impossible feat—but it is not,

and I am here to tell you why.

Burnout is a huge issue in the modern working world—it is even been recognised as a real, medical condition by The World Health Organization. The response both online and in the workspace has been panicked and reactionary. With tech regularly pinpointed as the culprit in this crime, workers have begun tech detoxes, using apps to block and track their usage. But can we really fight technology with technology? Tech is not in and of itself 'bad'; it is the way we use tech that is the problem. With electronic calendars synced up and shared between teams, people feel increasingly under pressure to fill every moment of every day. People no longer carve out personal thinking time—they spend all day 'doing' and no time 'reflecting'. The unending modern pressure



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subconscious—the part that ‘unpicks’ problems and presents us with our most creative ideas. Focussed thinking, though mentally strenuous, is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to thinking. Our subconscious is what lies beneath the waves; this is where our deepest thoughts, ideas, and problems are processed. Daydreaming bridges the gap between the unconscious and conscious mind. This research also revealed that when we are daydreaming, we are actually allowing the logical part of our brain to go dormant—hence, it really is a ‘brain break’—and one that is far more effective than simply avoiding Twitter for an hour.

Really, this is very good news: the creative process and downtime, in some ways, come as a package deal. Now, I am not suggesting

that bingeing Netflix and eating chocolate are going to result in any incredible ‘light bulb’ moments. There is a name for this state of focussed daydreaming; it is called transient hypofrontality. While this might sound like a scary brain operation or some kind of chant performed in an exorcism, it is actually a very positive thing. It is associated with an activity that allows you to disengage the logical part of your brain, so you can tap into the ideas that lie beneath. The great thing about entering a state of transient hypofrontality is that you are actually giving the other part of your brain time to recharge. It is as good as it sounds, so now it is time to get to the important part: ‘how’.

There is no exact science when it comes to entering transient hypofrontality—there is no switch you can flip, and part of that is because it requires you to be relaxed. When your brain is in overdrive, it can be quite challenging to switch off its logical part which is trying to



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think its way out a problem (but is actually just digging deeper into it). The key here is to try and do something with a monotonous rhythm—anything from jogging or walking to doodling or washing up can facilitate the state of focussed daydreaming. To really get the benefits of a brain break—especially when trying to solve a specific problem—you have to give yourself a good grounding in the subject area. Daydreaming is like putting your mind on simmer and the research you do beforehand provides the ingredients you need to get things cooking. After you have done the reading, now it is time to switch off entirely and let your subconscious get to work.

You will be glad to hear that taking a brain break puts you in good company—in fact, it places you in the realm of artists and geniuses. While we might imagine that the world's most famous scientists and artists were constantly go, go, go—records throughout history suggest

otherwise. Einstein made reference to 'thought experiments' where he would envision weird and wacky things. The theory of relativity came to him whilst imagining the journey he would take on a beam of light—how is that for a productive zone-out? The link between the ludicrous and the ground-breaking is far closer than we think. While the ideas that circle our mind when we kick out our logical thinking become weird and peculiar, it is the removal of these rational constraints that allows us to produce our most innovation solutions. Other famous daydreamers include Mozart and Thomas Edison. Mozart took long walks through the countryside—a habit which wove the fabric of nature into the sound of some of his most famous compositions. Thomas Edison was so convinced that the unconscious mind held his best ideas that he would fall asleep with ball bearings in his hands—the idea being that as he began to drift off, he would drop the balls and thus wake himself up. He would then note down any ideas which came to him in the transient in-between of sleep and wakefulness. Taking a brain break is not something only necessitated by modern society, but a tried and tested technique for creativity used throughout the ages.

So, do not let yourself burn out—keep the flames alight by taking a brain break. Forget detox apps and internet blockers; there is just one thing you really need to practise daydreaming: space and time. Giving yourself a short five-minute break is unlikely to reap real results; you need substantial time so you can actually switch off. So, clear out your calendar and step away from your phone—walk away from the desk, and let your mind wander. Once you gift yourself the time, you will find that your greatest ever ideas are just below the surface. ■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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