

Please Try This at Home

Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life

Waste Your Way to Worth

I've lived most of my life actively avoiding waste. There's a voice in my head that repeats like a broken record: life is short; resources are limited; so many people need help; there is so much to be done; there's no time to waste! Instead of the popular bumper sticker, "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention," the bumper sticker on my forehead would read, "If you're not busy, you're not paying attention." Actually, that's not true. I think it would be closer to, "If you're not busy, you're not worthwhile. You're wasting your life. You're not making the most of what you've been given during the brief time you've got." It would be a long bumper sticker.

Based on my personal bumper sticker, I think I may have bought into the theory of busyness that existential philosophers talk about: that time and resource efficiency is one way our unconscious mind combats the fear of death. If, during our lifetime, we can accomplish as much as most people would do in two or three, we have a bit more control. We're not quite so powerless against our impending doom. Plus, if anyone questions how we are spending our life, we can point to our day planners in defense: "See! I never wasted a moment! Surely, I have proven my worth!"

Now, those of you who aren't efficiency addicts will just have to trust me on this and follow along for a bit. Those of you who *are* crazy enough to have pursued efficiency to the extent that I have will know from experience that this approach to proving your worth works...for a while. But it's like a drug. If you are super efficient, you feel worthwhile, but then it raises the bar of what should be possible for you to accomplish during the day. The more efficient you are, the higher the bar gets set. And when you don't meet your ever-higher standard, the guilt of the waste has its way with you.

The Flawed World View of the Waste-less Life

Maybe it's that I'm getting older and I don't have the energy to super-produce all the time. Maybe it's the fact that caffeine has betrayed me, losing its once-magical effects so that it makes me feel sick, rather than alert. Maybe it's that I have friends and family who seem to love me whether I am efficient or not; in fact, I think they prefer non-efficient Jen. But I'm starting to think that the world view that's under most of my efficiency is just wrong.

Our world is so good at telling us that we are worth more the more we do, the better we look, the smarter we are, the more friends we have, etc. So when we're not busy working, we should at least be doing more to improve our worth by being prettier, handsomer, more interesting, more intelligent, more popular—name your favorite worth-gathering strategy. But what if we just "came" worthwhile? What if, in many ways, the most worthwhile thing that we could do was to just to "be"? Is that just too good to be true?

The other day, I saw the bumper sticker: "If you're not in AWE, you're not paying attention." What a radically different approach to life that would be! What if one of our main "jobs" during our time on earth was to be in awe: of creation, of people, of ourselves, of change, of time—all of it? Sure, we could work to earn a living and feed our kids, do an activity or two

along the way, but to live out our worth, rather than trying to prove it, we'd need to set serious time aside to be in awe.

Experiments in Waste

Now, to be totally honest with you, this writing sounds pretty foofy to me so far, pretty "pie in the sky." Efficiency's not all it's cracked up to be, but it's worked pretty well for me, all things considered. I'm not quite ready to chuck it. Besides, the social activist/moralist/responsibility-supporter in me is shouting that if we told everyone to drop their productivity and actively waste time being in awe, the lazy good-for-nothings would take it to heart and do even less than they already are. The responsible, upstanding citizens wouldn't hold up their end either. Basically, the world would just collapse and nothing important, meaningful, or life-saving would get done ever again.

But I've also been doing experiments with intentional time wasting, doing my darnedest to waste about an hour a day (man, does that feel LONG to me!) just living out the awe and gratitude of being by doing things that are not *at all* productive. Frivolous things. Kid-like things. Shopping for things I don't need. Wandering through art galleries. Walking really slowly. Not exercising. Not reading to advance my career. Not producing...anything. And so far, what I have discovered is that I feel more deeply worthwhile than ever before. I have *more* energy to be kind to people. I am less afraid because I know that my need to be feel worthwhile as a person, not a cog in an efficient machine, will be met most every day. It's easier to treat others as ends in themselves, not means to get my needs met. I like God more. I like my family and friends more. It's really, really weird!

I'm starting to wonder if intentionally wasted time is essential to allowing us to learn our worth. If we are always producing and achieving, how would we ever know whether our worth would remain if we stopped? Until we stop...and find that we are still loved. Setting aside time to treat ourselves like royalty who, for the moment, have nothing to do but pursue leisure, makes us feel like royalty, and then we can respond to others out of that richness, rather than our hectic, ever-growing energy deficits.

I'm also learning that there's a difference between filling our down time with distractions that numb our pain and dedicating time to experience awe, gratitude, and our deep worth. It's not so much the activity as the purpose behind it. Spending time with friends to avoid the solitude that reminds us of our loneliness is numbing distraction, while spending time with a friend who feeds our soul, rather than churning out another progress report, is time dedicated to feeling our worth. Drinking alcohol to forget that we feel anxious about our job/spouse/kids/body/schedule etc. is a distraction; savoring the flavor of a great wine to celebrate that we are alive and can feel pleasure helps us delight in our worth and enriches us. Many of us have "diversions" but we are starving for time wasted in awe!

An Invitation to Awe

If you have, like me, been feeling weary for a long time... If, when you think about stopping and resting, you feel fear and guilt rather than relief and delight... If people seem like distractions to you, impeding your essential tasks... If you don't have any hobbies that aren't focused on some sort of self-improvement or getting ahead...then I invite you to join me in some experiments with scheduling time to waste in awe, maybe half an hour a day, maybe 3 hours on a weekend. During this time, see if you can do whatever you are drawn to do that is not at all

productive and that helps you experience awe in and gratitude for yourself and the world around you. Watch out for defaulting to the things you typically use to numb pain to just get you through. Instead, see if you can find things that actively bring you joy. See if you can try it as regularly as you can for a month, since I'm pretty sure it takes about that long to have an effect. I'd love to hear what you discover. It sure is changing my life!

This is not as easy as it sounds. Trust me, I know! So if you or someone you know encounters difficulty with these experiments, feel free to *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email info@jenniferdiebel.com.*

Thanks for reading!

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