



CONCERN:EAP

Healthy & Resilient You

How to Use **Creative Hobbies** to Boost Performance

Serious leisure comes with
serious benefits

Remember when a 9-to-5 job meant getting to work at 9 a.m. and leaving the office (in body and mind) at 5 p.m.? It seems like ages ago. Nowadays, full-time work can feel like we're working all the time, and the statistics agree.

50% of salaried workers
average more than **50**
hours of work per week

55% of workers don't use
all their time off

We've written before about just how important breaks and time off are to our mental and physical wellbeing. Insufficient downtime can lead to fatigue, decreased productivity, diminished life satisfaction, and even more severe health consequences, such as depression.

Another consequence of too little downtime is that it can cause our creativity engines to slow down or stop working altogether. When that happens, our happiness can suffer.

Considering how hard we're all working, it counts as a small victory when we do manage to disconnect from work for an evening, weekend, or vacation. *Why is it then, even after we manage to take time away from work, we often don't feel recharged?*

One theory suggests that it might be because we're doing our downtime wrong.

Serious Talk about Light Leisure

What would you think if we told you that all leisure activities aren't the same? Behavioral science tells us that it's so. And that, by being more mindful of how we spend time off, we can counteract post-break lethargy and build resilience.

In short, it's time to get serious with your downtime. To kick things off, here's a snapshot of the two categories of leisure.

Casual Leisure (Not So Good)

A short-lived, instantly gratifying and usually passive form of leisure. It tells the brain to release dopamine for a quick jolt of bliss that rapidly wears off, leaving us feeling fatigued and dissatisfied once the weekend is over.

Example activities: Clubbing • Shopping • Gaming • Binge-watching TV or sports • Social media immersion

Serious Leisure (Good!)

This type of leisure is longer term, more meaningful, and more fulfilling. It's also fun and enjoyable, despite its name. Serious leisure exercises your creative muscles by drawing on your innate talents and helping you develop new skills.

Example activities: Playing an instrument • Singing • Writing • Gardening • Photography • Cooking • Knitting • Drawing • Creative writing • Stamp collecting

A 2014 study from San Francisco State University found that serious leisure comes with serious benefits. The study concluded that subjects who regularly engage in serious leisure activities or creative hobbies:


-  Perform up to **30%** better while at work
-  Feel more relaxed and in control of their lives
-  Are found to be more helpful and creative on the job by their colleagues


You know the saying *work hard, play hard*? It looks like it's true if *playing hard* means playing at creative, engaging hobbies.


Here are some thoughts on incorporating more serious leisure into your life.





The Keys to Your Creative Engine

 **Don't Just Bring Work Creativity Home**
Try to separate your home creativity from your work creativity. **For example:** If you're a graphic designer by trade, step away from the computer and try painting or sketching for a similar pursuit, or writing or making music for something different.

 **Make the Time and Make It Important**
Any serious leisure activity only works if you pursue it. It can help to put hobby time into your schedule and set goals for that hobby to make it feel less casual. Musicians, challenge yourselves to learn a new song on a set schedule. Artists, clear a blank space on a wall or shelf and plan to display your new creation on a certain date.

 **Go Back to the Playground**
What did you love to do as a kid, but stopped doing when grown-up realities intervened? Did you rock in gym class? Consider joining a community sports team. Have a blast in arts and crafts? Throw on a smock, break out your favorite arty supplies, and get your hands dirty.

 **Optimize your Opportunities**
Often there's not much time to indulge in leisure activities, so make sure you can quickly get into the groove when you do find the time. Designate a spot in your home to be your leisure workspace, free from the clutter of daily life. If your hobby is portable (like drawing or writing), pack some supplies with you and break them out when you find free time on the go.

 **Express Yourself**
Our work at the office is often driven by others, whether it be the company, supervisors, or workgroups. Creative pursuits at home can often be for others as well, such as cooking a big holiday meal for family or creating something as a gift. When it comes to leisure time, be creative in pursuit of something that you find personally fulfilling. If you like to cook, you might try a new recipe with ingredients you like, just for yourself. Experiment with a hobby that keeps you engrossed, even if no one else gets it.

Looking for more ideas on building out your serious leisure schedule? Try Mindset from the **CONCERN App Garage** for strategies and tools to help achieve your creative goals through the power of tiny habits.

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If you find your level of stress is impacting your well-being, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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