

# REST

Sometimes we struggle with rest. We long for it, we plan for it, we don't always feel we can take it and then, on occasion, we spend the time we should be resting, fretting about all the things we should be doing when we are working. Sometimes you take a break from work but even if you don't do any 'work work', you swap it for another type of business. It is like we just can't stop.

Employees being able to stop has been an issue a number of businesses have grappled with. Recently, it has led to some new and innovative ways of encouraging people to have time off and to have a break. Employers recognise that rested employees usually means better employees. Those who never take a break and don't allow themselves to rest, are more likely to get burned out. Burn out isn't good for people or for business. So what have these big businesses done? They have offered unlimited holiday.

Unlimited holiday I hear you cry, what a great idea, but is it? Companies like Netflix, LinkedIn, Evernote, Kickstarter and Kronos have all experimented with unlimited holiday. Already ranked by Forbes as one of the best employers in the world, Netflix started offering unlimited holidays as far back as 2010. Due to the irregular hours, sending emails on weekends and having to make fixes to the system in the evenings and weekends, they knew that their traditional 'use them or lose them' holidays weren't working. So they started a change – bosses were focused more on what people got done and not on the hours and days that they worked. They didn't need a holiday policy.

LinkedIn adopted discretionary time off where there is no minimum or maximum holiday, instead staff work with their manager to request time when they need it. They say that it means employees can respond to their own needs and bring their best self to work. Evernote try a different approach, encouraging staff to take time off to relax and re-charge and give them a 1000-dollar budget to travel anywhere they like. They are literally paying people to have a holiday. Sounds great, what's the problem?

Well, it turns out, the problem may not have been the holiday allowance, the problem may actually be us! CharlieHR offered unlimited holidays like the other companies, they allowed anyone in the organisation to take it but what happened? No one took enough. They found that not only did employees not take enough holidays but there was huge amounts of anxiety around not knowing the limit as well as meeting deadlines and preparing handovers. This anxiety kept people at work. There is another psychological factor at play here too though. It turns out that if you have a set number of days holiday, you feel it is yours to spend. If you have no limits to how much you can take, many people seemed not to value the time in the same way.

What are the findings of the unlimited holiday experiment? Well, mixed success depending on who you speak to and how established it has become in the company. What is interesting is that the data suggests that people nearly always take the same amount of holiday they would have always been given or, surprisingly, they took even less. Some companies found that when employees took more holiday it coincided with profits going up. Some companies had to enforce a minimum holiday allowance to ensure people took any holiday at all! Others gave up and went back to a set allowance.

It seems strange and contradictory. We want more holiday but then take less. We say we want to rest but then we end up doing work. When given free choice, many employees take even less holiday than they would have been given. What's going on here? Why do we seem to have such a complex relationship with rest?

## APPLICATION

All of these employers were trying to do the right thing by allowing their staff time to rest. One of the things that is often quoted to you if you are a teacher is that you have very long and generous holidays. We could debate that in another podcast but just because we have a generous number of days holiday doesn't necessarily mean we are more rested. One of the challenges about school life is that many leaders feel they cannot be properly 'off'. Leaders may be involved in results days, school trips, unexpected safe-guarding incidents, building issues since we usually get the building work done when the school is not in use, there are staffing issues that need to be addressed. When there is a community tragedy or unrest, we worry if any of our young people were caught up in it. Then if you have managed to get away, you will be sitting by a pool about to take a sip of your cocktail and all of a sudden you hear, "Hi Miss, or 'Sir, is that you? For all the joy of the job, switching off can be a real challenge.

But switch off we must – somehow, we really do have to or we find out running on the treadmill of life becomes more like a 'dreadmill'. Dr Dalton-Smith talks about 7 types of rest, not all of them require money, a flight and a sun lounger. She says the 7 types of rest are:

1. Physical
2. Mental
3. Emotional
4. Social
5. Sensory
6. Creative
7. Spiritual

When we do not take time for all of these different types of rest, our perspective goes. As Nietzsche said, "when we are tired, we are attacked by ideas conquered long ago" and he's right. Due to our obsession with toxic productivity, we keep going long beyond any sensible boundary. In fact, we either don't put the boundary in in the first place and then get swallowed up by events OR we just willingly push the boundary over and disregard it.

We need boundaries so that we can rest. We need boundaries so that we can respect our need to rest. By honouring our own boundaries we are sending a clear message to others that they can honour theirs too. It isn't just a selfish act, we have to lead by example.

Physical and mental rest can be sleep. John Steinbeck said, "a problem difficult at night is resolved in the morning after the committee of sleep has worked on it". But rest can also be emotional rest by doing something totally absorbing like a game, an escape room, a hobby. It can be spiritual in the form of prayer, meditation, yoga, attending a service or being awed by the awesomeness of nature. It can be social, seeing friends, sharing memories, talking about things that are not work. Sensory rest could involve giving your senses a break from screens, a digital detox perhaps, getting off email, getting outside.

We don't need to be on an all-inclusive thousands of miles away, although nice if we can do that. We do need to build in moments of rest every day, every week. We are not good at it. The experiments on unlimited holiday showed that. Perhaps it isn't the number of days that is the issue, it is what is happening in our heads that is.

Rest is still suffering from a PR problem. Many of us remember the days of burning the candle at both ends and being rewarded for it, even promoted because of it. We know the facts now though, and those facts are that people who rest are ultimately more productive, more efficient, more able to challenge the demands of the job and may even be happier. The world has woken up to these facts and businesses are trying to help people rest more BECAUSE they know it is good for everyone.

It is time WE really embrace it too.

## QUESTIONS

Your willingness to stop and rest will not always be linked with how exhausted you are, but what storyline your head is telling you. Sometimes we are exhausted but we just won't stop. As leaders, we **MUST** model good rest behaviour.

- 1) Prentice Hemphill said, "boundaries are the distance at which I can love you and me simultaneously". Boundaries are good. It is OK not to give all of yourself to others so you can look after yourself. Think of a time when you ignored your boundary and it impacted you negatively.
- 2) Out of the 7 types of rest (Physical, Mental, Emotional, Social, Sensory, Creative and Spiritual) which ones are you good at and which ones do you not engage in very much at all?
- 3) If you were a poster girl or boy for rest in your school, what would the advert say? How do you feel about that?

If we are going to be people who work well and rest well, we need to be people who are disciplined and boundaried with our time and with our energy. It will benefit you, it will benefit your school and you will reap the rewards. Let's celebrate when we find moments each week to rest and let's encourage others to do the same.



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