

Playing at Work: A New Productivity

Twice this year, I have fallen asleep doing homework.

More than twice this year, I have endangered my health.

Almost constantly, I am sleep-deprived and inefficient.

The time I spend doing homework certainly doesn't seem justified. Like the majority of high schoolers in the U.S., I have not nearly enough sleep—according to the National Sleep Foundation, 85% of high school students also don't receive the 8½ hours of necessary sleep a night. Sleep deprivation breaks the circadian rhythm, endangers the immune system, jeopardizes the physical health of a student; yet here I am, still going to sleep at 1-4:00a.m., not getting the breaks I need.

I'm a wreck of a high-schooler, the mid-secondary-school crisis. And from this wreck came an onslaught of the symptoms. Acne. Fatigue. Drowsiness sneaking into my life without warning.

When my parents picked up on these issues, they jumped on the obvious problem: a lack of sleep. My dad told me to "wing it" and my mom proposed that I drop classes, but I told them I didn't think I could give up this rigor with which I worked. My struggles, my toils, my pains—they're a part of me and can't simply be taken.

I recently read an article, "Is it dangerous to sleep with your smartphone?" that brings up excellent advice about the risks associated with smartphone usage in bed. According to Chad Ruoff, a clinical assistant professor and a doctor at the Stanford Center for Sleep Sciences and Medicine, "[smartphones] provide too many opportunities to stimulate the mind around bedtime. We should not be performing stimulating tasks close to bedtime, regardless of whether or not we are in the bed. We should strive to keep a buffer zone between daytime activities and sleep." While I am not a heavy smartphone user, the idea of destimulation stimulated my mind. I try to keep my mind active at all times. According to Ruoff, too much so—the time just before bed is the most stimulating time for me, the time to finish up studying and try to fit everything into my head to get processed in the next REM cycle. I program computers to keep my mind constantly active; if I don't have enough time to code an entire project on a computer, then I bring around my Rubik's cube. On a regular school day, my life is a cycle of eating, sleeping, moving, studying.

But this method of studying doesn't seem right. It seems increasingly true that mental relaxation—which seems to be the opposite of stimulation—plays an increasing role in productivity as well. And this doesn't only mean going to bed earlier and having a nicer, cozier sleep; this should be true for all life as well.

The difference between the two is mostly in connotation; the underlying fundamentals of both are the same. Stimulation differentiates mostly from relaxation in terms of the rigor of the subject at hand; a relaxing action can be of the same topic, but simply without the same intensity of study. I can relax learning calculus or running ten miles or debugging code, so long as it's not so hard as school.

In fact, because rigor and difficulty are highly subjective and may vary from person to person based on one's skills, the difference between the two is mostly titular. To approach a test with the confidence of achieving a full score is an entirely different task than to feel afraid, even if equipped with the same knowledge. Likewise, to treat work as play, or vice versa, can greatly affect the way a task is approached and achieved. For the former, there is a stricter sense of time and accomplishment, but pressure puts one on edge; the latter gives room for creativity, albeit without the practical sense of time management.

This relaxed play is necessary for the imagination and innovation that drives every creative part of a person's life. To sit at a blinking cursor for half an hour is nothing like finding inspiration in the mathematical wonder of a Rubik's cube.

They say that you can only focus for 45 minutes at a time on a certain topic before your mind drifts off. I say that if you spend those 45 minutes and find yourself drifting off, mindfully embrace those few distracted moments. For it is not only distraction, but a different idea and a different perspective. And who doesn't like to have a little fun here and there?

Mirhashem, Molly. "Is it dangerous to sleep with your smartphone?" *Hopes&Fears*. Hopes LLC, 4 Jan. 2016. Web. 27 Oct. 2016. <<http://www.hopesandfears.com/hopes/now/question/217105-is-it-dangerous-to-sleep-with-your-smartphone>>.