

Take a breather, keep the edge

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The standard corporate reaction to the credit crunch will usually include a strong suggestion that you must run harder to stay in the same place.

Working longer hours - and packing more into each hour - may seem the only way to keep one step ahead. But you'll soon find that all that extra effort requires increasing amounts of adrenalin. But adrenalin is designed to enable your body to cope with a momentary crisis, not to sustain regular, marathon work-schedules.

Furthermore, when this emergency hormone provides you with an extra energy boost this can often be at the expense of your reasoning and decision-making faculties.

Long, stressful work sessions need to be balanced by regular relaxation. Studies prove that a programmed escape from daily pressures has a measurable impact on heart-rate, blood pressure, blood sugar, oxygen consumption and brain activity. That means you need to slow down periodically in order to keep your competitive edge.

Exhilaration

I used to give regular seminars for a chain of retail jewellery stores, and made friends with one of the craftsmen whose job was to engrave names on sporting trophies. Eventually he decided to set up his own business, where he was immediately offered as much work as he could handle. At 40 years old, he was his own master for the first time, and he told me of the sheer exhilaration of being able to increase his income just by working longer.

He became consumed by this new vision, proudly forecasting how soon he would be able to afford his first luxury car, his first fitted bathroom and so on - provided he just worked a few longer hours each day.

It didn't turn out like that. Too many late nights started to affect the quality of his workmanship. He began to lose his professional touch, and business began to decline. Eventually, he had to go back to being a full-time employee at another jewellery company, working nine-to-five, where, fortunately, he managed to regain his former skill and professional flair.

This proves the point that working twice the hours does not always deliver twice the output (or earn you twice the money)!

You don't necessarily have to follow the Japanese rule of 10-minute "stretch breaks", but you might reflect that the Japanese type of entrepreneurial ethos does seem to work. You don't have to be a Buddhist, but you may note how many wise individuals all over the world have opted for those mind-soothing rituals.

My own preference is to break-up unnaturally monotonous positions or tasks. Your body was not designed to sit for eight hours at a desk - so get up and walk about regularly. Try to get away from your desk and use that break enjoyably. You'll come back refreshed and able to make sure that it is only credit that is being crunched - and not you!

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