

Take Time to Play

- it is the secret of perpetual youth

By Rob McKelvey

“ We don’t stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.” George Bernard Shaw.

Playtime is important for the well being of all individuals; physical, as well as mental playtime. It can take a variety of forms. It can be individually oriented or team oriented. Bottom line is that it keeps the child in us alive. And everybody can use a little child in them. In fact we all have a little inner child in us at all times. It is just a question of whether we let that child come out to play; or whether we keep it locked away and out of sight.

I maintain that it is perfectly acceptable to be childlike and experience that sense of wonderment that comes with play and exploration. But somewhere between being a child and becoming an adult we exchange play for responsibilities. When we do get leisure time, all too often, we “veg” out in front of the TV or computer. “Play is good” to paraphrase Gordon Gecko in the movie Wall Street. Play can lead to excitement, relaxation, a sense of accomplishment, and increased physical and mental skill. Play can tap into your creativity and imagination.

Oh, by the way, play is not the opposite of work. In fact you can be playful at work. Play is usually voluntary and involves a level of active engagement. Think back to when you were a child and remember how easy it was to start up a game of tag or hide and seek. Play also has its own rewards. We play to learn, feel challenged, pass time, experience social interaction, relax and typically experience a sense of feeling good.

Play has that natural feel good aspect to it. It is useful in combating loneliness and depression. When we play vigorously, like when we exercise, endorphins are released into our system. This is a natural reaction of the body that has the beneficial result of making you happy. And who doesn’t want to be happy.

Psychiatrist Mihal Csikszentmihalyi has studied play and he refers to it as a flow state that requires a balance between challenge and opportunity. To put it simply, if the game is too hard or too easy it

loses that balance and therefore the enjoyment. When in the flow state we experience feelings of involvement, motivation, confidence, serenity, timeliness, clarity, and delight. All good feelings to have, in my opinion.

Next time you get stressed, or run into a road block on a project at work, rather than continue beating your head against a wall why not try a little bit of play. Research indicates that play at work refreshes your mind and body, triggers creativity, keeps you functional, helps avoid burnout, allows for a different perspective, and builds teamwork.

Let your inner child out to play every once in a while. It will do you both some good. What ways can you think of to play both at work and in leisure time?