

Work Hard, Play Hard: How Entrepreneurs' Leisure Crafting Affects Their Work

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How should entrepreneurs spend their time to enhance their effectiveness? Conventional wisdom would suggest that entrepreneurs must dedicate almost the entirety of their time and effort at work to breathe life into their ventures, but we found otherwise.

Life in a new venture is stressful work as entrepreneurs must invest significant amounts of time and effort into their ventures to navigate uncertain environments where setbacks are frequent. Because of this, entrepreneurs tend to have an intense compulsion to work, often being labeled as “workaholics.” Despite this, entrepreneurs also have a tremendous amount of flexibility in structuring their lives. Yet, the focus is typically on entrepreneurs’ work lives, thus overlooking another important aspect of their lives: their leisure.

In our research, we wanted to understand how entrepreneurs can intentionally and proactively structure their leisure, referred to as leisure crafting, to overcome stress and obtain work-related benefits. How can cultivating interests that promote learning outside the work domain help entrepreneurs deal with stress and how can this structuring of their leisure time impact their work? We explored these questions through a series of four studies in which we surveyed a total of 1,015 entrepreneurs using established scientific measures.

When entrepreneurs focused on crafting their leisure, they were more successful at managing their stress, they were more effective at generating novel ideas, they were better at recognizing opportunities, and they performed better.

What does leisure crafting look like and why was it helpful? Leisure crafting involves a proactive pursuit of leisure activities that facilitate goal achievement, human connection, learning, and personal development. Unlike passive leisure (e.g., watching tv or sleeping), leisure crafting involves a serious and intentional structuring of one’s leisure geared towards detaching from work, finding new challenges, developing new and inspiring connections, and obtaining novel skills and knowledge. For example, entrepreneurs might craft their leisure to read, learn a new language, or attend classes/seminars, all of which may improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Additionally, they can participate in social activities, allowing for networking opportunities to bounce ideas off other individuals and to gain exposure to new information and diverse perspectives. By engaging in leisure activities that promote their learning and personal development, entrepreneurs can step away from work to gather new knowledge, skills, and information that can aid in idea generation, opportunity recognition, and performance. Additionally, this emphasis on one’s leisure can facilitate detachment from work, which can be energizing. This increased energy helps foster success as it allows for a more vigorous engagement in one’s work.

However, given entrepreneurs’ tendencies to work extremely hard, we found that the benefits of this emphasis on one’s leisure were diminished when the entrepreneur focused too heavily on their work. Why? Think of it this way: leisure crafting allows entrepreneurs to develop and learn, detach from work, and discover new and valuable knowledge outside of work. Entrepreneurs must focus intently and seriously on these leisure activities to obtain these key benefits. However, when entrepreneurs are engaging in these activities, but their attention is focused heavily on their work

instead of placing their attention wholeheartedly on the leisure activities at hand, their energy is further depleted and they are unable to put 100% into their leisure, thus reducing the benefits associated with it.

Now, we most certainly do not advise that entrepreneurs focus entirely on their leisure at the expense of their work. Entrepreneurs still need to work hard to achieve venture success. Instead, we are suggesting two broad recommendations: 1. Entrepreneurs should allocate a portion of their time for leisure crafting, and 2. While taking time away from work for these leisure activities, entrepreneurs should minimize their focus on work and concentrate their attention solely on the leisure activities they are engaging in. In sum: by taking time to leisure craft without any preoccupation with work, entrepreneurs can increase their abilities to be creative, recognize opportunities, and obtain the resources needed for success. Lastly, non-entrepreneurs can also benefit from taking breaks from work to recover, socialize, and master new skills. Thus, we contend that entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs alike can equally benefit in their careers by proactively structuring their leisure to focus on personal development and learning outside of work.

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