

# The Power of Having Fun: How Meaningful Breaks Help You Get More Done

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AN ACTIONABLE BOOK SUMMARY

LifeHack

# Embracing Life's Oases: Navigating Through the Deserts of Work and Life

In today's high-paced world, where the boundaries between work and personal life often blur, the concept of "deserts" and "oases" becomes increasingly relevant. A "desert," as defined here, symbolizes periods of deprivation or chaos that individuals endure, hoping for a brighter future. This metaphorical desert is not just a phase but a state of being where one is constantly pushing through challenges, much like the young business owner who worked tirelessly while seeking refuge in the virtual world of World of Warcraft.

However, life is not meant to be an endless journey through the desert. This is where the concept of "oases" comes into play. An oasis represents those scheduled, affordable moments of joy and fulfillment amidst the arduous deserts of life. They are the small, deliberate pauses we take to rejuvenate and enjoy the present, rather than perpetually waiting for a distant "someday." This approach is encapsulated in the "Culture of WIN" (Well-being, Interest, Now), advocating for enjoying life's moments in the present rather than solely focusing on future rewards.

The significance of oases cannot be overstated. They are not just rewards that come after hard work; they are pre-wards, motivating us through the journey. These moments of leisure and enjoyment are essential to maintain a balanced life. They should be brief, affordable, and free of guilt or destructive consequences. These oases come in various forms - Personal, Family, and Work - each serving a unique purpose in enriching our lives.

To fully harness the power of having fun, one must journey through five stages: Permission, Discovery, Scheduling, Protection, and Enjoyment. The first stage, Permission, involves allowing oneself to have fun without guilt. Discovery is about remembering what brings joy, tapping into the carefree pleasures of childhood. Scheduling ensures that these moments are not left to chance, while Protection

involves planning for potential obstacles. Finally, Enjoyment is about being fully present and engaged in these activities.

Illustrating these concepts, the story of a school owner who, with the help of coaching, learned to work less while growing her business and expanding her family, demonstrates the transformative power of incorporating oases into one's life. Similarly, a married couple found a way to reconnect by scheduling time to watch their favorite show together, moving beyond constant work talk. These examples highlight that oases should be an integral part of our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly schedules, not just limited to vacations.

Harvard research supports this approach, showing that breaks can significantly boost creativity, health, and focus. Oases are, therefore, not a luxury but a necessity for maintaining performance and preventing fatigue. They are essential components of a well-balanced life, ensuring that we do not just survive but thrive in our personal and professional endeavors.

## Actions

### Embracing Personal, Family, and Work Oases

Recognize the importance of creating and maintaining oases in three critical areas of your life: personal, family, and work. Personal oases are activities that rejuvenate you individually, family oases strengthen bonds with loved ones, and work oases enhance job satisfaction and creativity. Assess your current engagement in these areas and make a conscious effort to integrate enjoyable activities into each. These oases are essential for a balanced and fulfilling life, serving as vital breaks from the daily grind.

**Personal Oasis:** Identify activities that you enjoy alone and schedule regular time for them. These should be activities that relax and rejuvenate you, separate from your work and family responsibilities.

- Choose activities that truly bring you joy and relaxation.
- Schedule regular, uninterrupted time for these activities.

- Ensure these activities are guilt-free and do not create financial or emotional burden.

**Family Oasis:** Plan and prioritize activities that involve your family or loved ones. These should be engaging, enjoyable, and inclusive for all members.

- Select activities that are enjoyable for the whole family.
- Schedule these activities regularly and treat them as important appointments.
- Foster an environment where every family member feels included and valued.

**Work Oasis:** Integrate fun and stress-relieving activities into your work routine. These should enhance your creativity, focus, and overall job satisfaction.

- Identify activities that can be easily incorporated into your workday.
- Schedule short, regular breaks for these activities to avoid burnout.
- Encourage a workplace culture where such breaks are accepted and encouraged.

## Strategic Scheduling and Protection of Oases

Prioritize the scheduling of your oases and protect them against potential disruptions. Treat these scheduled times for personal, family, and work-related fun as non-negotiable, much like important meetings or appointments. This approach ensures that you regularly recharge, leading to increased productivity and a more balanced life.

**Prioritize Scheduling:** Treat the time allocated for your oases as a high priority, scheduling them upfront rather than as an afterthought.

- Schedule your oases at the start of each week or month.
- Be as committed to these times as you would be to important work meetings.
- Remain flexible but firm in protecting these scheduled times.

**Plan for Obstacles:** Anticipate potential challenges that might interfere with your oases and strategize ways to overcome them.

- Identify common disruptions to your scheduled oases.
- Develop contingency plans to address these disruptions.

- Stay committed to your oases, adjusting plans as necessary but never forgoing them entirely.

## **Continuous Assessment and Adjustment**

Regularly evaluate your engagement and satisfaction with your oases. This ongoing assessment allows you to fine-tune your activities to ensure they continue to bring joy and relaxation. Adjustments may be needed as your interests, family dynamics, or work environment change.

**Evaluate Engagement:** Regularly assess how much joy and relaxation each type of oasis brings to your life.

- Periodically review your personal, family, and work oases for their effectiveness.
- Seek feedback from family members and colleagues on how these oases impact your relationships and work.

**Make Necessary Adjustments:** Be willing to change or introduce new activities based on your assessments.

- Adapt your oases to changing interests or circumstances.
- Ensure that your oases remain a source of rejuvenation and not a routine chore.
- Involve family members in decisions about family oases to ensure continued engagement and enjoyment for all.

# Enhancing Productivity and Relationships Through Enjoyable Breaks

The concept of taking breaks is not new, yet its importance is often underestimated, particularly in the hustle of adult life. Children, with their instinctive wisdom, regularly take recess breaks from schoolwork, understanding intuitively that this helps renew their energy and improves performance. However, many adults, especially in the United States, paradoxically undervalue their paid vacation time, leading to a scenario where those who vacation less frequently may actually earn less than their more relaxed counterparts.

The underlying principle behind this paradox is simple: taking enjoyable breaks recharges one's batteries, boosting dopamine production, which in turn enhances motivation and overall performance. Adults, however, often need permission, a sort of personal licensing, to schedule non-work activities without guilt. This mindset shift is crucial in acknowledging the value of leisure time and its impact on productivity.

Rediscovering forgotten childhood hobbies and activities can be a starting point in building a personal list of 'oasis activities'. These activities can be categorized into various timeframes, ranging from daily to yearly events, allowing individuals to incorporate them into their schedules effectively. A practical approach is to start with scheduling a short, free daily oasis and to protect that time religiously. This practice not only rejuvenates but also serves as a buffer against the relentless demands of work life.

The concept of building in buffer time – around 10 minutes every work hour – can significantly mitigate the stress of unexpected interruptions. Similarly, inoculating against guilt by encouraging others to enjoy their own oasis breaks is equally important. Assigning a specific value statement to each oasis event further reinforces their importance.

This approach extends to email and task management, where processing these before and after major oasis activities can ease the transition between work and leisure. Setting affordable expectations aligned to one's budget and interests is key to making these breaks enjoyable and stress-free.

In addition to planning, the mental process involved in enjoying these breaks is critical. It involves acknowledging and emotionally assessing the positive moments, verbally expressing gratitude for small joys, and following a brain-heart-mouth order which strengthens neural pathways to positive emotions. This methodical approach not only enhances the enjoyment of these moments but also reinforces their positive impact on mental well-being.

Scheduling weekly and monthly oasis events, and an annual multi-day oasis, should be done with consideration to one's interests and financial means. These should be protected and rescheduled within a set timeframe if necessary, to ensure consistency.

It's essential to transition from work mode before relaxing into any scheduled oasis period. The mind, often caught up in multitasking and busyness, fails to register the enjoyable moments as they happen. This lack of awareness, often compounded by a 'deserving' mentality, blocks the experience of happiness from these positive occurrences.

Enjoyable activities, by releasing dopamine, play a critical role in motivation and performance. However, conditioning ourselves to constant motion reduces our awareness of positive emotions. The societal messaging often overrides the brain's innate drive to reward positive experiences, leading to a decreased ability to feel happiness and enjoyment. Like a mental muscle, the ability to feel joy and pleasure needs to be strengthened through consistent practice.

This practice involves intellectually tagging enjoyable moments, emotionally assessing how they feel, and verbally expressing thanks. Such consistent scheduling of oasis moments makes success habits more automatic, protecting one's calendar from being tampered with by others. It's about validating one's own self-care, rather than comparing it to others, and giving due importance to planning and budgeting, especially for costlier yearly oases.

The compounded strength of daily oasis moments creates significant results over time. Understanding that the struggle to feel happiness may indicate cultural conditioning overriding natural reward systems is pivotal. Ultimately, little enjoyable work breaks fuel the dopamine levels that boost motivation and achievement. Fully transitioning into relax mode before each scheduled oasis activity ensures optimal recharging and benefits.

## **Actions**

### **Scheduling and Protecting Your Oasis Time**

Recognize the importance of scheduling and protecting time for activities that rejuvenate and bring joy. This involves identifying and incorporating small, enjoyable activities into your daily routine, planning for larger breaks such as vacations, and ensuring these times are honored and free from work-related interruptions. The goal is to create a balance where these oasis moments are an integral part of your daily life, contributing positively to your overall well-being and productivity.

- Identify daily activities that bring joy and relaxation.
- Schedule these activities into your daily routine, ensuring they are short and manageable.
- Plan for longer breaks, like weekends or vacations, that align with your interests and budget.
- Actively protect your oasis time from work-related interruptions, ensuring you fully engage in these moments.

### **Cultivating Mindful Engagement and Appreciation**

Develop the habit of engaging mindfully with your oasis moments and expressing gratitude for them. This involves acknowledging positive experiences, emotionally connecting with these moments, and verbally appreciating the small joys. Such mindful engagement enhances the quality of your breaks and reinforces the positive impact on your mental well-being.

- Consciously acknowledge and savor positive moments as they occur.

- Reflect on the emotional impact of these experiences.
- Verbally express gratitude for these moments, reinforcing their positive effects.

## **Planning, Reflecting, and Adapting**

Commit to a cycle of planning, reflecting, and adapting your oasis activities to ensure they continue to meet your needs and contribute to your happiness. This includes setting realistic expectations, reviewing your activities periodically, and making adjustments as needed to align with your evolving interests and life circumstances.

- Set realistic expectations for your oasis activities based on your interests and resources.
- Regularly review and reflect on the effectiveness of your scheduled breaks.
- Adapt and make changes to your oasis activities as your interests and circumstances evolve, ensuring they remain aligned with your needs for rejuvenation and joy.

# Embracing Joy and Connection: The Art of Personal and Family Oases

In the hectic cadence of modern life, finding moments of joy and connection is essential. Personal and family oases, those small yet significant breaks we consciously integrate into our daily lives, are not mere luxuries but necessities for a balanced, fulfilling existence.

## Personal Oases: A Pathway to Individual Fulfillment

Personal oases are those deliberate pauses we create amidst our busy schedules to rejuvenate and find joy. Recognizing the need for fun and meaning in life is the first step towards giving ourselves permission to embrace these oases. To make the most of them, it's crucial to schedule buffer times, ensuring these moments aren't lost in the hustle of daily tasks. Contrary to the feelings of guilt that might arise, these breaks can enhance overall performance. It's a simple truth: even if one doesn't initially feel the urge for an oasis, participating in it can lead to a significant mood boost.

Structuring personal oases involves meticulous planning. Vacations should be thought out well in advance, with adequate time allotted for catching up on work before and after. To avoid financial strain, setting a budget at half of what one can afford is wise. Daily mini-oases, like enjoying lunch outdoors, serve as quick yet effective breaks. Weekly events, such as hiking or attending concerts, offer deeper rejuvenation. Monthly oases can encompass entire mornings or afternoons dedicated to personal projects or hobbies. Yearly oases, the most elaborate, are opportunities for week-long vacations or thrilling adventures.

Consistency is key in establishing personal oases. They should be scheduled regularly, at set times and days, to ensure they become an integral part of one's routine.

Acknowledging the positive feelings experienced during these moments, both mentally and emotionally, is important. Expressing these feelings enhances the experience, making it more meaningful.

## **Family Oases: Strengthening Bonds Through Shared Experiences**

Family oases require a similar acknowledgment of the need for collective fun and meaningful activities. Engaging with loved ones to understand their interests helps in planning activities that are enjoyable for everyone. Recognizing why an activity is meaningful to a family member not only validates their feelings but also strengthens the familial bond. Daily shared activities, even as simple as a meal, weekly date nights, or friend gatherings, fortify relationships. Monthly family oases can include day trips to parks or museums, while yearly oases provide extended vacations, creating new and lasting family memories.

Like personal oases, family oases should be protected and nurtured. Enlisting the help of counselors to improve strained relationships can be beneficial. These shared experiences are akin to watering a plant – they need to be consistent and nurturing. Adapting activities to ensure they are enjoyable for all is a crucial part of this process. Committing to these moments, even when relationships feel distant, can lead to significant improvements over time.

Family oases not only boost work performance but also foster confidence and career success. These shared experiences create lifelong memories and have a generational impact. It's essential to slow down and mentally acknowledge these precious family moments as they happen, assessing how they make one feel emotionally. Expressing these feelings, either out loud or in writing, reinforces the bonding experience. Such acknowledgment can produce oxytocin, the bonding chemical, enhancing the sense of connection. Brief, positive interactions with loved ones have been shown to reduce stress and promote health. Failing to appreciate these moments means missing out on their full emotional impact.

After enjoying family oases, expressing gratitude and giving surprise gifts can deepen the sense of appreciation and joy. These shared experiences not only build positive memories but can also strengthen marriages and parent-child bonds. While vacations are important, it's crucial to enjoy the present rather than constantly planning the next

adventure. Reflecting on and improving the quality of oases after they occur can make future experiences even more rewarding.

## **Actions**

### **Establishing and Embracing Personal Oases**

Creating personal oases involves intentionally setting aside time for activities that bring joy and relaxation, away from the demands of work and daily life. It's about recognizing the importance of self-care and leisure in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. This practice not only rejuvenates the spirit but also enhances overall productivity and well-being. Developing a routine for personal oases can range from short daily breaks to longer, more immersive experiences.

- Schedule short, daily activities that provide a break from routine, like a quiet lunch or a brief walk.
- Plan for weekly activities that are exclusively for personal enjoyment, such as a hobby, a sports event, or a cultural outing.
- Organize longer, monthly or yearly activities that allow for deeper relaxation and disconnection, like a day-long project or a vacation.

### **Cultivating Family Oases for Bonding and Rejuvenation**

Family oases focus on creating and maintaining shared experiences that strengthen family bonds and provide enjoyment for all members. These shared activities should cater to the interests of all family members, creating a sense of inclusivity and mutual enjoyment. Regularly scheduled family activities, ranging from daily interactions to annual vacations, are essential in nurturing family relationships and creating lasting memories.

- Establish daily shared moments, like meals or short activities, that foster regular family interaction.
- Implement weekly family events, such as game nights, outdoor adventures, or cultural experiences, to deepen family bonds.

- Plan for larger, monthly or yearly family activities, like day trips or vacations, that provide a platform for creating shared memories and experiences.

## **Reflecting and Adapting Oases for Continuous Improvement**

The key to sustaining personal and family oases over time is in their continuous evaluation and adaptation. This involves reflecting on the effectiveness of these oases in achieving their intended purpose, recognizing areas for improvement, and adapting them to meet evolving needs and preferences. It's about maintaining the relevance and enjoyment of these oases to ensure they continue to serve as effective means of rejuvenation and bonding.

- Regularly assess the impact of personal and family oases on your and your family's well-being and happiness.
- Identify aspects that might need adjustment, like the frequency, duration, or type of activity, to enhance the experience.
- Adapt the oases accordingly, experimenting with new activities or adjusting existing ones to better suit changing interests and schedules.

# Cultivating Happiness and Engagement in the Workplace

In the contemporary work environment, the quest for happiness and engagement often falls victim to the "Culture of WISH" – a mindset where contentment is perpetually deferred to some future ideal, seldom realized. This culture breeds dissatisfaction, as evidenced by the fact that only about one-third of US employees feel truly engaged at work. The remaining majority oscillate between disengagement and outright hostility. This trend not only affects individual morale but also corporate performance. Studies have shown that companies with highly engaged employees consistently outperform their competitors.

The key to unlocking higher employee engagement lies in embracing fun and meaning in the workplace. Contrary to popular belief, happiness at work transcends mere job satisfaction; it hinges on fulfilling personal needs. Yet, the pursuit of an ideal "perfect" job is a fallacy. All jobs entail unappealing tasks, and expecting otherwise is unrealistic. Instead, a more practical approach involves finding joy and meaning even in mundane circumstances. This can be achieved through meaningful breaks, which are essential not just for relaxation but for productivity as well.

Understanding one's unique workplace "ultradian rhythm" is pivotal in this process. Typically, the optimal cycle of work before necessitating a break ranges between 90 to 120 minutes. Breaks should be self-defined – activities that genuinely bring joy, not those perceived as enjoyable by others. Such practices counter the negative impact of relentless work cultures, which can erode health, morale, and retention, incurring substantial indirect costs.

Forward-thinking companies like LinkedIn, Pixar, and Kiva serve as exemplars in this regard. They have instituted practices such as "InDays," playrooms, and recess, recognizing the direct correlation between employee well-being and corporate success. Moreover, the tone set by executives significantly influences company culture. They should motivate employees through training and opportunities for self-designed fun while leading by example.

The transformation towards a more engaged and happy workforce involves a meticulous process. It requires tracking performance metrics before and after implementing fun practices, assessing the costs of turnover versus gains in productivity, and presenting evidence from these experiments to decision makers. Ultimately, each employee bears the primary responsibility for their happiness at work. This is facilitated by creating Personal and Family Oases – dedicated times for relaxation and enjoyment, rigorously scheduled and zealously protected. These oases serve as reminders of the reasons for working hard and are critical in preventing burnout.

## **Actions**

### **Fostering Employee Engagement and Happiness**

Focus on creating a workplace environment where employees feel engaged and happy. This involves understanding their needs, providing opportunities for fun and meaningful work, and ensuring a healthy work-life balance. Develop strategies that encourage employees to take meaningful breaks and participate in activities that boost their morale. Create a culture that values employee well-being as much as productivity.

- Conduct surveys to understand employee needs and satisfaction levels.
- Introduce and promote practices that integrate fun and meaningful work.
- Encourage regular, self-defined breaks to enhance productivity and well-being.
- Implement flexible schedules to accommodate personal and family time.

### **Establishing Personal and Workplace Oases**

Create spaces and times that serve as refuges for employees from the demands of work. These oases should be tailored to individual preferences and can range from quiet areas for relaxation to vibrant spaces for creative activities. The concept extends to scheduling protected time for personal and family activities, ensuring employees have time to recharge and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

- Designate areas in the workplace for relaxation and creative activities.
- Schedule and strictly protect personal and family time in employee calendars.

- Encourage employees to personalize their oases according to their interests.
- Regularly reassess and refine these spaces and times to ensure they meet employee needs.

## **Measuring Impact and Continuous Improvement**

Continuously assess the effectiveness of implemented practices and make adjustments as needed. This includes tracking changes in employee engagement and productivity, analyzing the financial impact of these practices, and gathering feedback from employees. Use the data collected to refine strategies and demonstrate the value of employee well-being initiatives to decision-makers.

- Track performance metrics before and after implementing new practices.
- Analyze the financial impact of employee engagement initiatives.
- Collect and incorporate employee feedback for continuous improvement.
- Present evidence-based findings to decision-makers to advocate for ongoing support and resources.