

THE BENEFITS OF CREATIVE LEISURE INTERESTS

Leisure is back in town!

Leisure today is about the creative expression of your natural talents for the sheer intrinsic pleasure of the experience. This article spells out leisure's vitally important role in every facet of modern personal and business life and especially in one's post-working life.

Let's start by getting the facts straight about leisure. Derived from the Latin *licere* – to be permitted – leisure is about freedom to choose what you want to do. No work/leisure distinction. The 16th Century church leaders kicked off the negative image of leisure with the belief that “idle hands are the work of the devil”. 19th century Industrial Revolution managers adopted the principle of work being the vital core of life and leisure being a hindrance to productivity – a perception that continues to be held by too many managers today.

So, what's changed?

Leisure is still the freedom to choose. The change is in the way we live, the speed of change, the constant excessive pressures we endure, technology change and the resultant changes in how we think about surviving it all. Suddenly (in historical terms) leisure is back in town – bigger and better than ever – offering huge benefits towards enjoying a resilient, progressive and satisfying life.

Nature's stress manager

A really enjoyable leisure experience is in essence nature's stress manager. It transports your mind away from your stresses and pressures for the duration of the experience. It's not just that you switch off from your problems but that you positively switch your mind on to an interest that is totally unrelated to your work or other areas of your life. Could you possibly even *think* about your problems while you paint a landscape or hit a winning tennis shot past your opponent, sing in a choir, or while you are enjoying the glories of a colourful sunset?

When you lose yourself in an interest you love, you find yourself.

While you are creatively expressing your talents and passions for the enjoyment of it you become so absorbed in the experience that you forget all else. The real you comes alive. You totally control all that you are doing during that time, lifting your self-esteem, self-

confidence, and sense of self-worth. You have an enthusiastically open mind and a heightened sense of innovation and unlimited potential.

The outcome is a refreshed and different perspective of your world, your problems and your attitude towards any stress-related issues you may be dealing with in your life.

The Ripple Effect

The benefits don't just stop when you return to other things. The energy and good feelings you gain flow on into the rest of your day. Done frequently enough they can change your whole outlook on life for the better.

Skills Development

Any passionate leisure experience is using, developing and building your natural talents and skills. For example if you are an office-bearer in a club you could be developing all or any of organisational skills, project management, delegation, social skills, media skills, team-building. Every skill you develop has value in everything you do at play, at work, at home, or in community life. I am amazed how rarely workplace skills audits ask people to identify talents they use in their leisure interests. Moreover they are talents that they enjoy using and would love any opportunity to use them in their job.

The energy that drives your life

I once asked a friend "what do you do for energy? She answered " I go to the gym three times a week". I then asked what energised her and she immediately answered " I love tap-dancing". Physical activity is important for physical fitness. Enjoyable activities/interests are vital to mental fitness. For me personally, golf is important to my physical fitness and choir singing sustains my mental fitness. Whether your interest be physical or mental, it's the enjoyment factor that exercises your mind.

Choices

Because leisure is a freely-chosen experience, in this day and age it is perhaps your last bastion of free choice. No one else can tell you what you should enjoy.. There is an almost limitless range of factors that may influence your leisure choices.

- The experience is custom-designed by you to suit you.
- A truly enjoyable leisure experience self-empowers you – you enjoy the feeling of being totally in control
- you choose to pursue the interest
 - When you want
 - For as long as you want
 - At the pace you like

- In the setting of your choice
- to your chosen level of skill and ability
- With the people you choose, or alone if you prefer
- You allow yourself to be you, not a person you think others might want you to be. So much of your adult life is spent trying to meet the expectations of others.

Your life is your responsibility

Clearly leisure pursuits play a much bigger role in your life than just the fun you gain from it. It forms part of your responsibility to make the most of your talents and the passions with which you were born, that can drive your dreams and enable you to realize a potential unique to you.

My professional qualifications in the area of leisure and recreation planning and development

- Graduate Diploma in Recreation Planning: Canberra University 1975 making me one of the pioneers of the professional recreation movement in Australia Bachelor of Arts ANU Canberra 1965
- Senior Recreation Planner (and various other managerial positions) with the SA Department of Recreation and Sport, 1976 – 1994' Recreation Planner City of Tea Tree Gully Adelaide 1994 – 2002
- Life Member and a past National and State President of my professional association, Parks and Leisure Australia