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Self Help: Staying Sane When You're Never Good Enough

Dan Matthews · Wednesday, March 7th, 2018

You've undoubtedly heard the legend of Sisyphus, but here's a reminder: Sisyphus was the king of Corinth, a man who tricked Hades into locking himself up in the closet with handcuffs. Sisyphus kept tricking death until finally he was condemned to push a stone up a hill in Tartarus (hell). He could never complete his task, he could never do his task well enough. Each time he reached the top of the hill, the stone went right back to where it started.

Isn't that what it's like in the world of self help and productivity today? You must constantly improve. Keep pushing the stone up the hill. You can always be more productive, and here are the tips, tricks, hacks, and apps to make it happen. There's always more knowledge to attain. Brain not working well enough? Here's an app, some nootropics, and some food to help make you smarter. Set your goals, never give up, be a leader not a follower, think positively. Produce, produce, produce!

Where is this all leading us? It's a national frenzy and we seem to have the answer to everything. We have the answer to improving memory: meditation, coffee, berries, sleep, exercise, and, uh, chewing gum (really?). We have the answer to sleep deprivation and anxiety: essential oils and herbal remedies, meditation, exercise, and "the great outdoors." We have the answer to healthy eyes: superfoods can make your eyes healthier. We have the answer to being more productive: "constantly create and seek clarity." What does that mean? It's about knowing what your priorities are.

Maybe the problem is you're supposed to know what your biggest priority is yet there are so many things tugging at you all the time. If you pay attention to what's always tugging at you, you get anxiety, and a lack of focus and productivity. Yet you're taught to pay attention to what's around you from a very young age.

When I was in the mental health field, we speculated that kids with Attention Deficit Disorder are a natural result of our modern predicament. Who's to say it doesn't make sense to divert your attention constantly as a way of coping with constant stimulus? In a world where everything is calling out for you, who's to say you shouldn't listen when everything calls? The problem is you're never truly listening to anything. Yet again, why does anything deserve your full attention? Or the other way of looking at it: everything seems to deserve your attention, so you give it.

A single task and a single conversation deserve your attention because you build a building brick by brick, right? If you're already looking at the other brick while you're trying to place the first one, the first one won't land. And in America, we're always building something. Many times we're

building something we don't need. That has a lot to do with our constant push to be productive.

In Denmark, they have "hygge," a state of being that is no doubt a big part of why that country is reportedly the happiest country in the world. Hygge is not a state of being productive. It's an unproductive state of being comfortable, content, and mindful of your comfort and contentedness. Adding hygge to your home is easy: light some scented candles, find a cozy spot in the room, get a soft blanket, enjoy comfort food, sip some tea, and then take a stroll outside (if you can't go outside "bring the outside in" by including greenery). This is the opposite of pursuing productivity and self help because you could always stand to be a better person. Hygge is just being in a place for the sake of being there and enjoying it. At least as far as I can tell that's what it is. Sounds a lot like mindfulness.

There's a reason why meditation is on the list for both improving memory and getting better sleep. Oh, and I forgot to mention it's on the list for being more productive, too. Meditation is the state of being in which you're doing nothing and something at the same time. This image shows how your brain's beta waves are affected by meditation:

Meditation clears the mind. You process less information, so in a sense you reset yourself, you lose stress, anxiety, and depression while meditating — you gain a clear head. If you're truly meditating, you're not thinking about how you need to be more productive, how you need to help yourself get better at life and achieve your goals. You're achieving the goal of not achieving a goal.

Stop. The next thing you might expect me to say is, "Meditate, and you'll be more productive when you need to be." It's statements like this that are the big folly of self help. *You are not meditating in order to achieve some other goal*. You are meditating to meditate. That's it. Forget everything else you've read in this article. Paradoxically, and joyously, meditating means you'll remember.

Featured image/Intergalactic Robot

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