

Session 3.12 | Recharge and Time Away

In the last few sessions, we've been looking at the importance of applied learning and several key reasons why leaders struggle to Apply the Learning. The first was because:

1. Investing so much in other people that we rarely have the time to invest in our own development. We don't make the time to invest in our own development.
2. Busyness & Distraction. And we looked at a number of key disciplines to help us overcome busyness and distraction.
3. Don't take time to fully recharge. And in the last session we saw that when we don't take time to recharge, we're continually drained of energy and we live in a continuous state of moderate to extreme stress.

The result is:

1. Lower productivity
2. Strained Relationships
3. Information Overload
4. Stagnation because we're unable to process and apply what we're learning.

You see, the secret to higher level of productivity again it's less about managing time and more about managing our energy. And we learned that there were two key disciplines for leaders to help maintain energy and focus...

1. Rest. We looked at rest and how to recharge with rest in the last session.
2. Time Away.

So as we get started in this session, take a moment and download the Worksheet for this session to follow along as we move forward.

Years ago when our children were small, I had spent several years working long hours, long days, week-after-week, month-after-month. I knew this was not sustainable, but I didn't know how to make it different. I didn't know how to make the change.

I began using some tools, in fact, some of the tools that we looked at earlier in this Fast Track. And I began seeing improvements in how I was using my time. One of the improvements was the amount of time that I was intentionally spending away from the office and away from my work with family and with friends.

Around this same time, my wife and I realized that we'd had a busy spring and a busy summer which included her completing a master's degree and her counseling licensure requirements she had finished up, we've launched and we're growing a new company. I'd navigated a significant career transition at the same time our son was born. I mean, we had a lot going on in a relatively short period of time. And maybe you've been through a similar season.

We both recognized that this incredibly chaotic time in our life and our work that we needed to get away. We spent several weeks away late in the summer with our two children on a much-needed vacation. And it ended up being an incredibly productive time for us in our relationships. Time away recharging ended up being incredibly productive for us.

The time away actually brought so many improvements to my life and my work when I returned that I sat down and I wrote out a number of things that made the time away so incredibly profitable for us in our relationships and in our family...

1. The fact that I unplugged and how important it is when you get away, when you spend time away to really unplug.

During our time away, we had spent a week at a secluded retreat in Central Virginia. I set aside all the projects and product development that we were doing at that time. Most experienced business leaders especially those who are running companies would discourage pushing the pause button on development this way – but it proved to be an incredibly profitable time for me.

It took me several days to just to get used to not checking email and social media regularly. But it became easier and easier with each passing day.

In fact, I had planned to resume writing and checking my email and social media much earlier. But I was enjoying the time away and the time unplugged that I even held out for a few more days. I felt very little pressure to jump back into my normal routine. And that's because I chose to set priorities and chose to prioritize my family and relationships over the work that I felt like it needed to be done the same time.

2. Focus on People.

The timing of our vacation really couldn't have been any better. This time away that we were able to spend, my wife and I were able to spend time enjoying time together. I was able to support her as she was caring for our new child who had been born just a few weeks before. She and I even found time to get away, just the two of us to revisit our dreams, our vision and our plans for the near future and for the longer term.

I spent a ton of down-time with our 2 month-old son. He was fascinating. Just looking at his tiny hands and his feet. Listening to his breathing sounds as he slept. Soaking in the warmth

of his miniature body as he laid on my chest during these moments, away from the busyness of work. They were priceless moments.

I also spent a lot of focused time with our daughter, who was seven at that time – singing, and playing, and sleeping. At the time I remember thinking that our beautiful little princess was growing up so fast.

We made milk shakes together. We went out on the boat. We ventured out to the general store. During our times together I remember thinking that even though she has a new little brother, I realized then that she will always be my baby.

Time away is more energizing when it is spent with people that you care about. My mind, my heart, and my body were all better because of the time that we spent away.

3. Make time for Reflection (or Meditation).

While we were away, again as I was writing down these notes, I was thinking about the time that I spent each day reflecting and journaling my thoughts and experiences from the past year. Because I had some margin that I didn't typically have on my work day. While I was away, I enjoyed so many life-changing experiences. I realized that my life and that our life and our work together will never be the same. We were going through a significant time of transition.

It was great not to have to be anywhere or do anything. Once again, I was reminded of how important it is to periodically take a break.

At the end of the time away I was fully recharged and looking forward to exciting opportunities in the days ahead.

If you haven't planned to take a break, if you haven't taken a break in a while, where you unplug, where you fully engage with people you care about, where you stop and reflect, then plan right now when you are going to do it.

Plan to take a personal day. Plan to make a weekend getaway. Plan a camping trip with your kids or grandkids. Plan to go on your next vacation. Whatever you need to do, make sure that you do it.

My wife now works in an industry that has an incredibly busy season. And because of that, she's not available during those times and seasons when our kids might have a break from school. So there are times when I've taken our children and I've gone away on a vacation while our wife stays back and work. And because that's so important to me, and so important to my recharge, and our kids being able to recharge, we've learned that it's better for us to go ahead and take the break even if she can't go with us. And then we find times that when she's able to get away, and we spend time away with her as well. But it requires you to be

intentional. To recognize when you need those times away and to make sure that you plan them into your calendar at critical times. So plan the time away. Plan your next trip with your kids or grandkids. Plan your next vacation.

Your life and work will be there when you get back. It won't all fall apart. Spending purposeful time away will make your life better and it'll make you better at life.

The secret to higher levels of productivity is less about managing time and more about managing your energy. Rest and Time Away are the two key disciplines if you're going to be able to recharge and for you as a leader to follow, so that you can maintain energy.

Now, I want to talk to you for a few minutes specifically about time away with the family - with your children or grandchildren.

In 2012, we took the best family vacation we've ever experienced - to North Dakota.

Most people ask, You went where?

At the time we didn't think it was all that weird.

In fact, it was the end of the week before we realized that every person we'd met in North Dakota had responded the same way when we told them we were there on vacation...

They all said, I've never met someone who came to North Dakota for vacation - for spring break!

St. Thomas, Hong Kong, Puerto Rico, Nepal, the Philippines, Mexico, Jamaica, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, and the Bahamas - we've been there. And they're all wonderful.

But I suspect that years from now we'll find that our greatest memories have less to do with destinations and more to do with purposeful time away.

Don't misunderstand - I'm not recommending that vacation planning becomes a chore and our destinations become boring. Not at all!

Here's what I am suggesting - 4 things to keep in mind when planning time away with the family...

1. Get away - for real!

Not to grandmas. Not with friends. Not to amusement parks. Not on busy beaches.

There's a time for those things - but not if you want to have the best vacation ever!

Great family experiences begin with planning intentional time away with only your immediate family.

For years, we have schedule a minimum of 2 separate weeks away every year for family vacation.

2. Involve everyone.

We had made a significant family decision a couple of years earlier. We told our daughter that she could choose to visit any place in the world that she is learning about in school and we'd do our best to make it happen.

Now, we didn't have a ton of money at the time - we were growing a new company. Which is what made this a BIG decision for us.

While we have not been able to travel abroad every year, this decision allowed our children to engage in learning about our world and connect more substantively with the family.

So when we began planning our vacation to North Dakota, I coordinated the planning. Sarah researched family fun. And Madison chose key sites and activities.

Several months before our vacation, Madison and I were sitting in a restaurant on one of our Saturday breakfast dates. I asked her, Where would you like to visit?

She listed several places around the world – I took notes. Then she said – And I want to go see where the Indians hang the babies on the trees.

I looked said up from my paper, What?!

She clarified – apparently certain Native Americans used to wrap their children tightly and suspend the swaddled child on a tree branch at night to protect them from wild animals. (With Thanksgiving just a few days away, she was learning about Indian life at school.)

Because she was involved in the planning, Madison was very engaged while we were away – and we spent a day on an Indian reservation. During the trip she even emailed photos of her experiences to her school teacher.

3. Plan.

If you're able to relax – I mean really relax – it will be because you were purposeful with planning.

I'm sure you're wondering – Why the heck did you go to North Dakota in March? (The average daily temperature was 20 degrees. There was 2 feet of snow on the ground when we landed in Fargo.)

So here's why – Madison wanted to learn more about Native Americans. One of the largest Indian reservations in the US is in North and South Dakota. She also wanted to go skiing. And there's still a lot of snow up there in March. (And the hills are small.)

At the time, North Dakota was one of four US states that I had never visited. (I've now visited all 50.)

So, with a little planning, I was able to check a couple things off my bucket list, Madison was able to discover more about her interests, Andrew did his baby thing, and Sarah was able to rest.

4. Rest.

After spending 24 hours a day together for several days in close quarters – in the car, hotel room, restaurants – patience can begin to wear thin with family members. (At least that's what I've been told.) If not kept in check, one explosion can destroy an entire vacation.

So we did several things to keep ourselves relaxed – we slept in, we didn't fill our days with tons of activities, and, most importantly, we took turns serving each other. Sarah spent the day in the lodge with Andrew while Madison and I hit the slopes. One afternoon, I hung out with Andrew while the girls went to a children's museum.

Since our trip, every time we talk about it, we tell people that it's the best family trip we ever taken together.

The secret to higher levels of productivity is less about managing time and more about managing your energy. And Rest and Time Away are the two key disciplines if you're going to be able to recharge and for you as a leader to follow so that you can maintain energy.

If you haven't already, take a moment right now to download the Worksheet on this page and complete the action steps for this session.

In the last couple of sessions, we looked at reasons leaders struggle to apply learning. Let's review for a moment:

1. Investing in others that it's difficult for us to make time to invest in our own leadership development.
2. Busyness & Distraction keep us from focusing on our development.
3. Don't take time to fully recharge. And we looked at two key disciplines for leaders to follow to maintain energy - Rest and Time Away.

Next Session

In the next session, we're going to look at a topic that affects all of us - What do you do when you're dealing with something incredibly challenging at work or at home that is distracting you?

And remember, you don't have to get it perfect. You just need to take the next step.

I'll see you in the next session.

Fast Action Steps

1. Schedule a time when you will look at your calendar and decide when you can get away.
2. List the people and the places that awaken the magic in you.