

STRESS

The Busier You Are, the More You Need Quiet Time

by [Justin Talbot-Zorn](#) and [Leigh Marz](#)

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In a recent interview with Vox's Ezra Klein, journalist and author Ta-Nehisi Coates argued that serious thinkers and writers should get off Twitter.

It wasn't a critique of the 140-character medium or even the quality of the social media discourse in the age of fake news.

It was a call to get beyond the noise.

For Coates, generating good ideas and quality work products requires something all too rare in modern life: quiet.

He's in good company. Author JK Rowling, biographer Walter Isaacson, and psychiatrist Carl Jung have all had disciplined practices for managing the information flow and cultivating periods of deep silence. Ray Dalio, Bill George, California Governor Jerry Brown, and Ohio Congressman Tim Ryan have also described structured periods of silence as important factors in their success.

Recent studies are showing that taking time for silence restores the nervous system, helps sustain energy, and conditions our minds to be more adaptive and responsive to the complex environments in which so many of us now live, work, and lead. Duke Medical School's Imke Kirste recently found that silence is associated with the development of new cells in the hippocampus, the key brain region associated with learning and memory. Physician Luciano Bernardi found that two-minutes of silence inserted between musical pieces proved more stabilizing to cardiovascular and respiratory systems than even the music categorized as "relaxing." And a 2013 study in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, based on a survey of 43,000 workers, concluded that the disadvantages of noise and distraction associated with open office plans outweighed anticipated, but still unproven, benefits like increasing morale and productivity boosts from unplanned interactions.

But cultivating silence isn't just about getting respite from the distractions of office chatter or tweets. Real sustained silence, the kind that facilitates clear and creative thinking, quiets inner chatter as well as outer.

This kind of silence is about resting the mental reflexes that habitually protect a reputation or promote a point of view. It's about taking a temporary break from one of life's most basic responsibilities: Having to think of what to say.

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Cultivating silence, as Hal Gregersen writes in a recent HBR article, "increase[s] your chances of encountering novel ideas and information and discerning weak signals." When we're constantly



fixated on the verbal agenda—what to say next, what to write next, what to tweet next—it’s tough to make room for truly different perspectives or radically new ideas. It’s hard to drop into deeper modes of listening and attention. And it’s in those deeper modes of attention that truly novel ideas are found.

Turning Stress into an Asset

by Amy Gallo

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by Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan

Steps to Take When You’re Starting to Feel Burned Out

by Monique Valcour

Even incredibly busy people can cultivate periods of sustained quiet time. Here are four practical ideas:

1) Punctuate meetings with five minutes of quiet time. If you’re able to close the office door, retreat to a park bench, or find another quiet hideaway,

it’s possible to hit reset by engaging in a silent practice of meditation or reflection.

2) Take a silent afternoon in nature. You need not be a rugged outdoors type to ditch the phone and go for a simple two-or-three-hour jaunt in nature. In our own experience and those of many of our clients, immersion in nature can be the clearest option for improving creative thinking capacities. Henry David Thoreau went to the woods for a reason.

3) Go on a media fast. Turn off your email for several hours or even a full day, or try “fasting” from news and entertainment. While there may still be plenty of noise around—family, conversation, city sounds—you can enjoy real benefits by resting the parts of your mind associated with unending work obligations and tracking social media or current events.

4) Take the plunge and try a meditation retreat: Even a short retreat is arguably the most straightforward way to turn toward deeper listening and awaken intuition. The journalist Andrew Sullivan recently described his experience at a silent retreat as “the ultimate detox.” As he put it: “My breathing slowed. My brain settled...It was if my brain were moving away from the abstract and the distant toward the tangible and the near.”

The world is getting louder. But silence is still accessible—it just takes commitment and creativity to cultivate it.

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Frances Dvorak 2 years ago

When we moved out of the city in 2000, our new home was near a wonderful forest preserve, and I began walking my dogs there frequently. At one point I realized I was craving that quiet time alone in the woods to the point that my day didn't feel right without it, that I didn't feel right. Those walks allowed me to think clearly, and for long stretches of time, without distractions or interruption. I also felt the bird sounds --gentle, melodic, spare-- played a kind of magical part in both calming and stimulating my mind. I used to joke that I was addicted to those walks but i've since realized this is what 'forest bathing' is all about. This article also reminded me of how so many people are uncomfortable with silence. I've heard that's primal, that silence can mean we're alone, and alone can mean we're vulnerable. And to that point, I do remember how my neighbors used to ask me how I could walk for so long alone in

the woods, and almost all of them would say, "I'd be afraid to be alone in there." So I think a lot of the noise and stimulation we get addicted to stems from a primal need to belong and feel safe and connected to others. As with so many other things, one has to find the right balance.

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