

The ABCs of Work: Rest

Career Development



Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today's topic delves into why peak performance at work requires you to build **Rest** into your schedule.

Last time we explored why you should find Quiet at work for particularly important topics. Today we discuss how building in periodic Rest at work helps you produce more than by simply working more hours.

Rest is for weak people, not winners (banish this thought)

Banish this thought from your mind. High performers usually accustom themselves to high standards and hard work. It's true being capable of hard work sets you apart. But Hard Work Doesn't Make You a Hero.

Your burnout risk is real. But that's not the best reason to avoid overwork. You take breaks because they unlock stronger performance.

I started taking lunchtime runs several years into my career. I made the choice for health and well-being reasons. I was thus determined to stick with my exercise habit regardless of any loss in productivity. Imagine my surprise to find I felt better and accomplished more on run days. This despite logging fewer "work" hours.

What is the mechanism? Simply this: rest and recovery are vital to peak performance. I can't tell you how many new ideas and solutions to thorny problems popped into my head on a run. Think of rest as refueling your tank, mental and physical, allowing you to perform at high levels longer.

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

How to spot signs you're ready for some rest

First, just pay attention to your thoughts. In one of your Quiet moments, check your feelings to see if you might not be ready for a break. Here are more likely candidates for times you may evaluate taking some rest.

- **You've been working intensely** for a decent spell. This might be a couple hours, or it might be a couple weeks. It depends on the project and your intensity. The longer you're trying to maintain your best performance, the more you're likely to need a break.
- **You've made a big step forward**. Sometimes the emotional rush from advancing motivates us to keep pushing. We want to leverage momentum. These can also be great points for short breaks, which can feel natural because they seem well-deserved.
- **You've had a big setback**. Our disappointment at failing can motivate us to redouble our efforts. This is natural, but we risk being colored by negative thoughts. A short break can help us reset and focus again in a positive way.

- **When you're emotional**. If you're flying off the handle, or feeling more highs or lows than usual, this is a good time to break your routine and do something else.

When rest is out of the question

As much as I promote work-life balance, sometimes you must sustain an all-out effort. If you are up against a hard deadline, tell yourself you'll rest once you're done. If you are on the cusp of great victory, pushing through to the finish is often preferrable to pausing to consolidate your gains. And some corporate crises permit no rest. We hope they come rarely, but when they do come, our jobs require us to be indefatigable.

Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as knowing when to take a rest break. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But the formula has impact, and all the more so because we've kept things simple. Here to finish are some honorable mentions to serve as food for thought.

- **Repeat** — When communicating, repeat simple, clear messages more than you think is necessary. You never reach everyone with one communication. Your guidelines, corporate values, and other cultural topics all require repetition.
- **Retreat** — Sometimes the best way to advance is first to retreat and consider an alternative approach. Because we're smart and formidable, we get used to winning. This means we sometimes take on improbable odds via head-on attacks. When we encounter stiff resistance, a tactical retreat and reevaluation can save an otherwise doomed campaign.
- **Reuse** — Lawyers love precedent and with good reason. No need for us to redo what has already been competently done. Your first step is to diligently identify and capture reusable content. Contracts and forms are the tiniest part. Every question you answer is implicit knowledge that you should capture for potential reuse in future. Over time your cumulative knowhow will become your team's greatest asset.

Be well.

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.