

breathing space

Reclaiming your weekends

Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

Remember when weekends were actually restful, fun, and rewarding? Somehow, for too many people, they've become an extension of the work week. Rather than having relaxing and titillating experiences, weekends often seem like one long set of errands followed by some excessive eating and late night television. Then, before you know it, it's MONDAY! Are there ways to savor the weekend and return to work fit and rested? You bet!

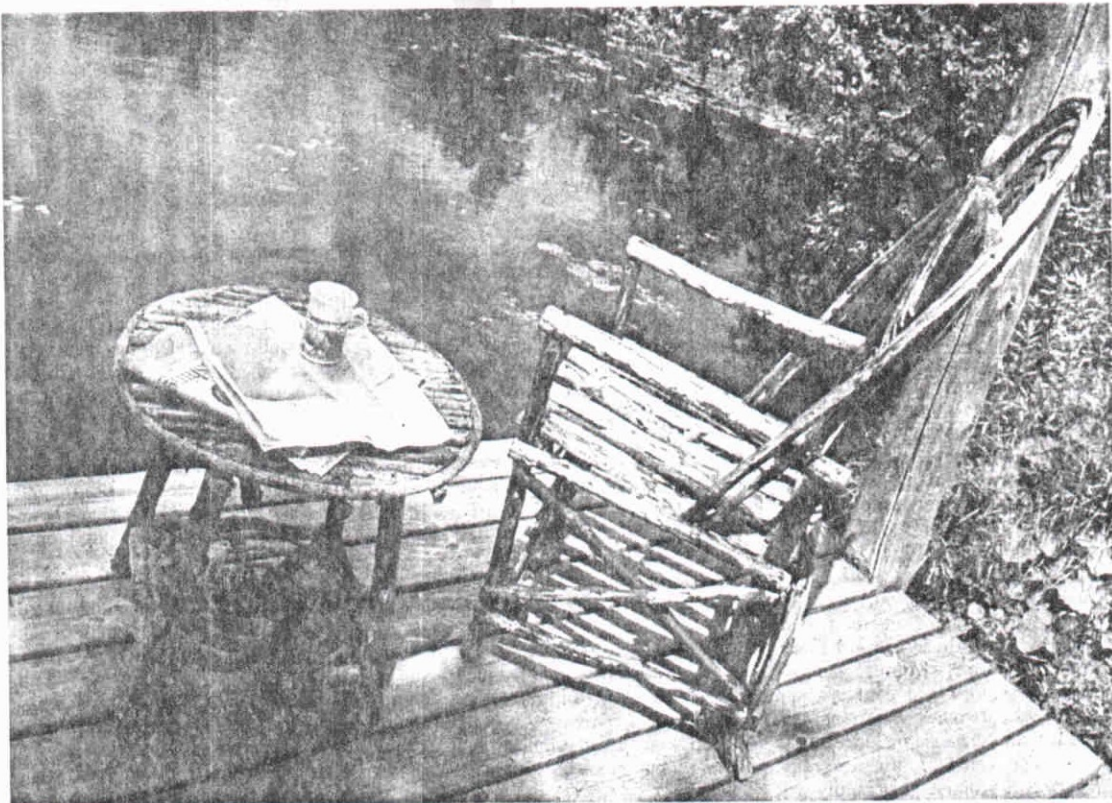
Do something rewarding on Friday evening. When it comes to Friday evening, there are different strokes for different folks. You may like to whoop it up, or to take it easy. You may like to go out with your one and only, or to spend a quiet evening at home. Whatever you do, don't overdo it. Many people who choose to let loose on Friday evening actually steal from their Saturday morning, even their entire weekend, and set themselves up for a situation where they're not fully prepared to return to work on Monday.

Avoiding the IDITWE Syndrome. "IDITWE" stands for "I'll do it this weekend."

Do you let errands pile up and then spend the weekend completing them? Instead of tying up a Saturday or Sunday, designate Monday evening from 7 to 10 p.m., or Thursday evening from 5 to 9 p.m. as errand night. Most businesses are open for extended hours. While dressed and in your car, there is no better opportunity to make the rounds.

On Saturday morning, feel free to sleep a little later, but not too late. Research reveals that you can sleep past the point of gaining benefit, end up depleting energy, and feel even more tired. So, if you traditionally sleep eight hours, but you get up on Saturday morning after nine hours of sleep, you may feel just fine. If you extend that sleep to ten hours, however, it may only yield the benefit of eight or seven hours.

In that last hour, without getting wrapped up in the physiology of it, lin-



gering in bed too long may contribute to the build-up of various toxins that otherwise would be dissipated as you move about the house and outside.

If you can't avoid errands, finish by noon. If you've avoided the IDITWE Syndrome, then you have a relatively clear, uncluttered weekend. Nevertheless, some domestic tasks and errands may arise or still linger from the work week. Strive to complete these before noon on Saturday, when most of the rest of the world still hasn't gotten out the door. After noon the congestion in many metro areas and particularly in suburban traffic patterns is actually worse than during work week rush hour. Now everyone is going every which way, whereas during the work week, the commute was in one direction in the morning and in the opposite direction in the evening.

Take a nap if you need to. Where is it written you can't lie in the hammock, on the couch, or even in your bed in the middle of the day on a Saturday or Sunday, and let your body renew itself? Like lingering too long in bed in the morning, however, don't overdo it. Beyond a certain amount of sleep, you may find yourself arising with grogginess.

TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM

Sleep researchers say that a nap of twenty minutes or less is ideal, because you arise without having engaged in R.E.M. sleep (rapid eye movements, a deeper form of sleep) and feel refreshed. If you have a handy timer, and these are available at Circuit City or Radio Shack, or simply a windup or plug-in alarm clock, set the alarm for twenty minutes.

Dr. Jack Edinger, at the Center for Sleep Studies at Duke University notes that the average person lying down for a nap takes between six and eight minutes to doze off. Therefore, if you allot twenty minutes for nap time, you'll sleep at the most, twenty minutes, but on average, only thirteen minutes or perhaps a little less. In any case, you're likely to awake feeling better than when you first put your head down.

What was good for Friday night is good for Saturday night. The advice for Friday night applies for Saturday night. You know what you want to do with your Saturday night, but be careful not to overdo it. College age youths as well as those throughout their twenties often begin their Friday and Saturday night socialization at 11 p.m., extending to 2 or 3 a.m. If you have one of these types

of people in your household, you know that they have no great energy the next morning as they struggle to get out of bed by noon. Then, when it's time to resume the work week, be it at school or a full-time job, on Monday morning, they're not exactly "chipper."

Heed your circadian rhythms. Your body likes routines, regularity, and predictable times. When you change your sleeping hours dramatically from one day to the next, your internal mechanisms are working overtime to try to accommodate you. Your daily cycles of sleep and body chemistry, your circadian rhythm, determines how well you think and move, and even how interested you are in sex, at different times of the day and night. ■

Jeff Davidson, based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and on the web at www.BreathingSpace.com, is a popular conference speaker and the author of more than two dozen books.