17 Unbeatable Ways to Create a Peaceful, Relaxed Workday

"For fast-acting relief, try slowing down." **- Lily Tomlin**

Last week when I wrote about things to do at work when you're bored out of your skull, a number of readers wrote about having the opposite problem: they're too busy to be bored.

Some of them seemed a bit overwhelmed by their workdays, and so I decided to share ways to create a more peaceful workday. One where you can allow yourself to be more relaxed and happier.

The first step is the realization that you are in control of your day. You can create the perfect workday, if you're willing to start from scratch.

Photo courtesy of miss karen

For some people, that may mean taking some tough steps, if their boss or their workplace is very controlling about how they do their work. For example, you might talk to your boss about restructuring your workday. It might also mean looking for a new job that's more flexible, if you're not happy with the way things are. Or it might just mean picking the tips below that work best for you and living with a certain amount of stress. Do what works for you!

For me, a perfect workday incorporates many of the tips below, but never all of them at once. I use a combination of strategies to ensure that most of my days are fairly relaxed. Do I still get stressed? Undoubtedly. But it's a far less frequent thing than in the past.

Here's how I do it.

1. **Do less**. Those of you who know me by now saw this one coming. It's very difficult to have a relaxed workday if you have too much going on. Instead, learn to reduce what you do, but choose the most impactful tasks and projects — the ones that will mean the most over the long term. I choose three important things to achieve each day, as I've said before. Those are the three things I can do today that will have the most impact in my life.
2. **Create a morning routine**. And make it a relaxing one. That could include some of the things below, such as exercise, a hot bath, or quiet working time. For me, it means getting up earlier so I'm not so rushed, and then doing little rituals (like having a quiet cup of coffee and reading) that will ensure I start the day perfectly.
3. **Prepare the night before**. An evening routine is also essential to starting your day right. This might include things like choosing your three Most Important Tasks for the next day, so you know what you're going to do when you wake up. It might mean getting your clothes ready. For me, it includes getting a jump start on

prepping my kids' lunches, so it's just about done before my day even starts.

4. **Start the day with a relaxing shower or bath**. I like a hot shower, but if you have time, a good bath can be a perfect way to start off the day. It gets you in a relaxed mood, which is much better than starting the day stressed out.

5. **Get in some morning exercise**. I don't get to exercise every single morning, but I do it on a majority of mornings. A nice morning run is a wonderful thing for me. It relaxes me, and gives me a sense of well being and accomplishment.

6. **Work when it's quiet**. I like to do work early in the morning, when everyone is sleeping. For others, that might be late at night instead. Whatever works best for you. When I was working in an office, I liked to get in before everyone else, so that I could get in some solid work before things got busy. I would also work during lunch while everyone else was out — I just liked the quiet. I would eat two smaller lunches before and after the normal lunch hour. Getting in early also allowed me to leave early, so that I could spend time with my kids or get in some evening exercise.

7. **Create a clutter-free environment**. This is key for me, as you might also know by now. I like my desk clear of any clutter. Right now, the only thing on my desk is my iMac (I'm paperless now). But it's OK to have a couple family pictures or an inbox, but too much stuff it just visual distraction. Clear your walls of everything but a nice picture or other art piece or two. Clutter-free surroundings create a peaceful working environment.

8. **Turn off the distractions**. That means phones, email notification, instant messaging, anything that will break into your focus and make you jump from one thing to another.

9. **Cut back on your commitments**. Evaluate all the things you've got going on in your life, and see what isn't essential. This means choosing 4-5 essential things in your life, and trying to eliminate the rest over time.

10. **Cut out meetings**. If you have the ability to opt out of meetings, do so. They are generally a waste of time. Sure, it's possible that a meeting is the most productive way to do something, but it's rarely done. Usually the point of a meeting could be accomplished with email, or an IM. Cutting out meetings could free up a lot of time and make your workday more relaxed.

11. **Single-task**. For me, focus is everything. Writing this article would take twice as long, and be much less peaceful, if I was constantly interrupted, if I was constantly switching between this and email and surfing the web and other tasks I have to do. I like to focus on one task at a time, if possible, and really lose myself in the writing.

12. **Take breaks and stretch**. While focusing on one task at a time is important, it's also important to take breaks when you can. Get up, stretch, get a glass of water. Massage your shoulders, neck and head. It keeps you relaxed throughout the day.

13. **Go for a walk**. I also like to take a break and go for a walk. It helps me get perspective, to think, to get a better overall picture on my workday and my life. Plus it gets the blood circulating.

14. **Eat lunch in quiet**. I'm kind of a shy guy, and while many people do lunch meetings, I would rather eat at my desk with a good book or take my sack lunch to a park for a peaceful, meditative eating break.

15. **Do mini-meditations**. This doesn't require a mat or a temple or soothing tapes or anything. Just sit where you are, close your eyes, and focus on your breathing — on your breath as it comes into your body, and then goes out. This helps me to center myself, no matter what is going on with work.

16. **Learn to focus on the present**. Related to the mini-meditations and single-tasking. Basically, instead of worrying about what you have to do in the future, and instead of reliving things you did in the past, focus on what you're doing right now. This can be difficult, as our minds have a tendency to wander to other things, but it's simply a matter of practice - be aware of where your mind is, and when it drifts to other things, gently bring it back to the present. This helps keep your mind in a peaceful place all day long.

17. **Roll with the punches**. There will always be things that go wrong. What is important is how we react to them — do we go all Drama Queen, and get stressed and upset? Or do we accept what has happened, and make a calm decision about what to do now? When things get overwhelming, take a step back to get some perspective, and realize that in a few months, none of this will really matter much — and then take steps to eliminate the non-essential and focus on what's really important.

"There's never enough time to do all the nothing you want." **- Bill Watterson, Calvin and Hobbes**

Author: Leo Babauta