Summer Stock: Using Your Extra Time in the Summer to Put Your Life in Order

As the summer approaches and vacation plans begin to take shape, it can be tempting to try to fit a month of activities into a week. Even though the summer months usually bring extra time we don't often make the best of it. While packed itineraries can take their toll and leave you wishing for another vacation, being unproductive can leave you feeling unprepared to rejoin the 'real world' at the end of your hiatus. This summer, balance out activities with downtime, making room for tasks you put off during the busier months.

Slow more than your motion. Whether you are lying on a towel at the beach or watching embers flicker at a campfire, time off means time to think and nothing promotes quiet contemplation better than a beautiful and tranquil setting. Just sit, relax, and focus on what is important.

For some, self-reflection can seem boring or uncomfortable, but turning off the music and tuning out the everyday distractions can allow for some shifting in the sands of your mind. When you have time to stop and contemplate, thoughts and realizations can come to maturity and result in positive changes in attitude, direction and help you set new priorities. And when these changes take place in your mind, you'll have time to communicate them and set plans in motion for the upcoming months.

Learn at your leisure. Are you a beach reader? When you're browsing through the bookstore this summer, go with a mission in mind. Make your leisure time work for you. What would you like to learn more about? Is there a hobby you'd like to take on? Do you have finances to improve? Romance to reignite? Turn ordinary leisure activities like reading or watching TV into learning opportunities by choosing a book or program that challenges you. If you find something particularly interesting, browse through a course calendar or search online for workshops with a community program or your local college.

Find fitness finesse. When you have a busy schedule, revamping your fitness regime may not make it onto your "to do" list. But the summer months offer ideal weather for finding new and fun ways to break through a fitness flat line. Ride your bike, walk through the park, run on the beach or go for a swim: remember a great workout doesn't have to be restricted to indoor activities.

Tackle that chore. They may call it spring cleaning, but that shouldn't hold you back. If the summer months offer more time for the tough tasks you've been avoiding, take advantage of it! Pick one project or spot in your house that needs attention. Enjoy a beautiful day by doing an outdoor task like painting the garage door or cleaning windows. When a rainy day arrives, put on some music, find the over-cluttered closet of your choice and start digging!

Tie up loose ends. Remember that shirt you always meant to take into the tailor's? Now is the time to do those personal things you can only do during business hours. You may end up with more in your wardrobe when you head back to work.

Renovate your resolutions. It's been a while since New Year's, but are you seeing the positive effects of your resolutions? Notoriously broken, many people set unrealistic New Year's resolutions and feel either the guilt over failure or indifference. We make them; we break them. Why not come back to them, look at your progress, re-evaluate and get back on track? Or, throw resolutions out all together and create a new set of goals that reflect a lifestyle change that is more realistic, complete with mini-milestones to celebrate along the way.

When busy and hectic schedules take over, vacation provides an opportunity to "shut down," and the idea of making the most of your summer can seem like a chore. But using some of that extra time to get your life in order is an investment in a happier return to work, a healthier body and a rejuvenated mind. Remember, this time is for you, and investing in yourself now means reaping more personal rewards in the future.