



[SF Gate Home](#)

[Today's News](#)

[Sports](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Technology](#)

[Live Views](#)

[Traffic](#)

[Weather](#)

[Health](#)

[Business](#)

[Bay Area Travel](#)

[Columnists](#)

[Classifieds](#)

[Conferences](#)

[Search](#)

[Index](#)

Jump to:



How to get out of that urgent rhythm

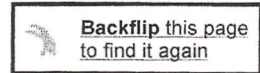
Sept. 03, 2000

San Francisco Examiner
EXAMINER SECTIONS

PAT MCHENRY SULLIVAN

THE PERSONAL computer revolution promised a paperless office where technological efficiencies would lead to increased leisure time. Instead, we have less time and less leisure.

- [Printer-friendly version](#)
- [Email this article to a friend](#)



Many of us never enjoy a spiritual or emotional release from the workday. Perpetually connected to work via cell phone and e-mail, we often feel disconnected from ourselves. In such a state, it's easy to drown in information while thirsting for wisdom.

We often forget how different people and computers are, notes Lois Silva, senior vice president for Mission Services at St. Joseph's Regional Health System in Stockton. Computers act out a quick rhythm of "enter, send, receive, respond. People also need time to reflect, to sort, judge and evaluate."

But it's harder to get reflection time, for the speed of computers has made us impatient. If we send an e-mail in the morning, we expect a response by early afternoon. Because computers can handle complex calculations in seconds, we expect human interactions to be almost as speedy.

Stewart Levine, author of "Getting to Resolution: Moving from Conflict to Collaboration," says that vice presidential nominee Joseph Lieberman offers an important role model. Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, observes the Sabbath commandment for rest and reflection even during campaign season.

"The Sabbath is the antithesis of 24-7 workdays," says Levine. "You dare to go offline for reverie, for deep acknowledgement, for something other than forge-onward activities."

All traditions have practices similar to Sabbath. Even nonreligious workaholics agree there can be benefits to going offline occasionally: renewing insight and energy; gaining a fresh perspective; restoring ourselves.

Still, it's not easy to go offline in a wired-up world. Karyn Hunt, editor-in-chief of the directory startup Quiver.com, says that the Internet is unfolding so quickly and so crazily that taking a break sometimes feels like trying to take a sip of water from a fire hydrant. Hunt gets offline in the midst of the workday by taking a Zen approach. "I focus in on the small task of each moment. Occasionally I come up for air and to get my bearing."

August Turak, CEO of the rapidly growing Raleigh Group International software company, regularly retreats to a Trappist monastery. When he works, he works hard and enjoys it, but most of the time he refuses to carry a cell phone after hours. His home telephone answering machine died

three years ago, and he doesn't work on a laptop during plane trips.

Turak learned from his mentor, Lou Mobley, founder and recently retired director of the IBM Executive School, that "the higher up in the organization you go, the more important people issues become. A really good executive spends enormous time on people issues, the rest on vision, to decide the things that are worth doing. These are values decisions, not efficiency issues."

Levine begins each day by writing poetry. A recent one includes this warning, "And one day you wake up and wonder and ask, 'What have I been doing with each lofty task?' The moment you realize that you are enough, you don't have to persist in all of that stuff."

Even if we believe going offline is beneficial, it can be scary. Will our downtime help someone else create a product or service that renders ours obsolete? Will colleagues see us as lazy or weak? Will we see something in ourselves we

don't like or can't handle?

Being in community helps us go beyond concerns like this. Every autumn, I envy Jewish friends, with their ten Days of Awe. Beginning with Rosh Hashanah, there's a celebration of the year that has passed. Then rituals like wading through a stream and emptying one's pockets symbolize release of old concerns. Personal and business relationships are assessed and cleaned up in preparation for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Autumn, the time after vacation and the summer harvest, seems the most natural time to end a year. If we modeled the Days of Awe in our work, we could dip fresh apples into sweet honey and name our gratitude for the past year. We could reflect on how we've grown and stretched, how we've served. Then we could face up to the ways we're harmed ourselves or others through our work.

It's never easy to confront the hard places in ourselves. But to the extent we dare do so, we become more secure. Some of our most nagging guilts are unmasked as neuroses that can heal. As we repent, we can find forgiveness.

When we go profoundly offline, we make new room for creativity, insight and courage. When we go back online, we can work more effectively. Our new year at work can thus be far more beneficial and satisfying than the one that is ending.

©2000 San Francisco Examiner Page J5

Sections

Feedback



New Year's Resolution #3:

This year I will be more adventurous