

Never Out of Touch—NOT!!!

By Bob Kriegel Ph.D.

The ethos today is 'never be out of touch'. We carry our cell phones strapped to our belts like cowboys carried their six shooters. And feel just as naked without them. We go out for a round of golf with our cell phone in the golf bag. We hit the beach with our pager and iPad resting under the umbrella.

An executive for a major fast food chain was showing his schedule to the new CEO. "I want you to know I'm always available," he told her. She looked at his schedule which looked as busy as a commuter line at Grand Central Station and with a genuinely puzzled expression, asked, "When do you get time to think?"

That's exactly the point. When you are constantly *in touch*, responding to emails, texts, tweets, Facebook friends, you are basically *out of touch* with your own thoughts, ideas, feelings and creativity.

Bottom line is that you will never get any innovative new ideas when you are constantly linked up. The head of a major international consulting company told me, "If you are never out of touch, constantly responding to what is coming at you, you're not doing your job as a leader. Your job is to proact not react and to come up with innovative ideas that will get your company out front." Stepping back from the action provides you with a different perspective. You see things you didn't when you were in the thick of it.

When I was teaching at Stanford's Executive Management Institute, we did a study on where people get their best ideas. They found what you'd expect. It was while driving, exercising, taking a shower, a nap, in the garden. In other words when you were 'out of touch.'

TIME OUT

A major business magazine did a study of leaders from all fields and found that over two thirds talked about spending a half an hour a day of thinking time. Some would leave the building and take a walk, others would exercise, and some talked about sitting and dreaming. All agreed this was the time when they did their best thinking. The CEO of Federated Stores online division told me that when he drives to work every day he is 'out of touch'. "I've got my cell phone, beeper and even the radio off. I always come up with my best ideas during drive time."

Discussing the importance of taking a creative break, or what I call a 'time out', Tom Peters mentioned that Horst Schulze, the President of the Ritz Carlton hotel chain, spends a half an hour every morning meditating on better ways to provide great customer service. And this is for an institution renowned for fabulous customer service.

I was a commentator for National Public Radio's Marketplace program for eight years. Every other week I had to come up with an innovative, entertaining commentary. But when I would sit at my computer trying to think of something to write, the blank screen always seemed like a reflection of what was on my mind. Nothing, Nada, Rien, Zippo! But when I would stop what I was doing and go for a jog, or a ride, ideas would start pouring out. For that reason I have learned never to leave home without my little mini tape recorder.

Keeping it in the family, my sister Gail, an award winning playwright told me that whenever I have a block writing lyrics or melodies or dialogue, I have to lie down or walk outside away from all Wi-fi, phone, and chatter. When I'm free of all voices, I can hear my own and can usually overcome the block and solve the problem in 10 or 15 minutes.

I was told that when former H.P. CEO John Young was touring Microsoft's headquarters with Bill Gates, he saw a manager sitting with his feet up on his desk looking out the window. When he queried Gates about the manager's behavior, Gates said, "He's doing what we pay him for...thinking."

Remember, taking a time out whether it's a five minute break with your feet up at the office, an hour 'out of touch' at commute time or two weeks on a South Sea Island, isn't down time. In fact it is just the opposite. These breaks will re-energize your up time increasing your creativity, productivity and enthusiasm. And you might even have some fun while you're at it.

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