

at ease

It's that time of year - holidays, vacations, long weekends, favorite getaways, far vistas, refreshing the mind, the heart and the soul.

On a vacation, particularly after a week of uninterrupted quiet and calm, we begin to experience peace and perspective. Problems shrink, affirmations naturally rise, and *joie de vivre* begins to prevail. Our view of our business and personal lives comes into balance. Thankfulness and gratitude for the lives we lead and the challenges we face well up from deep within.

Then we return from our vacation. For a day or two those matters which seemed overwhelming prior to our leaving assume a more manageable shape, and we easily dispatch them. Then things gradually return to "normal."

For many of us, "normal" means that details rush at us off the page or out of the mouths of our colleagues, wrestling for our attention. We respond, racing here and there, putting out fires, baling water out of the boat, whispering assurances, giving perspective. At the end of the day we're frazzled. We go home and lie awake that night. Bleary-eyed, we rise the next morning to descend into the mixmaster of that day's emergencies.

We all know CEOs who operate with *apparent* ease, some who naturally put others at ease, and maybe even a few who truly "go easy" on themselves. This column is about bringing more of that post-vacation ease into our lives. How much would that be worth to you? Many of my clients would answer, without hesitation, "Priceless."

Organizationally, having that ease within yourself is more important than you may realize. Your lack of ease, or dis-ease, gets communicated at least subliminally to others in the company. People worry about you, or at least what it is you know that's making you uneasy. Their imaginations work overtime and soon the imagined problems dwarf the real ones.

On the bright side, if you walk down the hall with ease and a bounce in your step, your pace-setting position in the company guarantees that everyone walks a little more

lightly that day. It's as if your mood projects itself onto the large screen which is your company's morale.

Among the many disciplines promising ease, the one which has worked well for me is setting aside quiet time each day, or at least each workday. This quiet time can be meditation, prayer, reflective reading, or just looking at nature, but it needs to be at least ten minutes of sustained quiet each day.

You say "I don't have time for that" or "My mind won't stand still" or just simply "It's a waste of time." The active minds of CEOs are used to going a mile a minute, leaping back and forth over a panoply of concern, opportunity and challenge. In my case, my mind wouldn't "stand still" until I'd been practicing for almost two years.

It's not easy, but what is the hallmark of CEOs? Mastering many disciplines, some of which take a long time. We have all done that repeatedly to get to where we are and stay there.

So if you're willing, what can you expect as you practice this discipline?

A relaxed mind lets the wellsprings of creativity flow, so that novel ideas or approaches just seem to pop up. Likewise, dilemmas seem to evaporate, and "middle ways" through thickets present themselves. Then, with practice, contemplating "nothing" becomes more comfortable and a deep relaxation (like we experience on vacation) begins to develop.

When cares do surface, it's easier just to note that they are there as part of our overall mental and emotional landscape, without letting them dominate the scene. Clearing the mind and the body of unwelcome interference becomes regularly possible and a sense of inner empowerment arises.

After a session the mind feels "washed clean," ready for the challenges that the day may bring, confident of its capacity to deal with whatever the day may present. The heart feels open and full, giving us the priceless gift of authenticity in our relations with others, be they business associates or others in our lives. And we have unfettered access to our gut feelings of intuition or instinct, so important for guiding our businesses and

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our lives in the midst of uncertainty.

So what is the ultimate goal of practicing this discipline? Becoming fully at ease, authentically centered in yourself, leading a balanced business and personal life, and being alert and ready for the challenges that each day presents.

Like all ideals it is rarely reached, but in the course of progress toward it, magnificent events occur.

Progress toward this ideal is meaningful for any individual, but when the individual is the role model and culture-setter for a company, it can liberate an entire workplace. It can be the company's primary source of power!

Roger's Thesaurus highlights some relationships between "ease" and other qualities (which I've categorized by management concept):

OPERATING STYLE

Grace
Simplicity
Flexibility
Disentanglement

MANAGEMENT STYLE

Lighten the Labor
Easily Managed
Easily Accomplished
Self-confident

PERVADING ATMOSPHERE

Cheerfulness
Geniality
Good Humor
Raise the Spirits
Full of Play
Jubilant

COLLECTIVE RESULTS

Prosperous
Thriving
In Luck
Take Heart

Who among us does not ardently desire most of these qualities for the culture of our companies? And yet it's our ease that gives the green light to the spontaneous emergence of these qualities in us as CEOs and in our companies.

So I've written about the benefits for your company of having you as

A CEO at ease. How about going beyond the utilitarian to the benefits for you personally? Certainly introducing more of that immediate post-vacation ease into your life is its own reward. But in addition there's that benefit described by Charles Simic in his poem, *Summer Morning*:

...and all of a sudden
In the midst of that quiet,
It seems possible
To live simply on this earth.

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