



Learn how a pause helps focus at work

Too many people fear they will get behind if they take a breath.

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Who has time to pause? To catch a deep breath when there are ringing phones and buzzing handhelds and deadlines and endless workloads? If people take a break, they believe, they'll be further behind.

But Nance Guilmartin believes that thinking has led to incivility in the workplace. The inability to give ourselves a moment to gather our thoughts, she said, is what has led to bad decisions, fruitless arguments and high stress.

Guilmartin, an executive coach, said workers need to learn they can drop the habit of "knee-jerk reactions" to situations or people at work. They can take a minute to consider what they've heard and ask questions to make sure they understand the situation before commenting.

In her book, "The Power

of Pause: How to Be More Effective in a Demanding, 24/7 World." (Jossey-Bass, \$24.95), Guilmartin told of a nurse who reacted with disbelief when she was advised to slow down. As a busy professional with multiple patients, limited resources and the stress of ill or dying patients, the nurse was incredulous that anyone would tell her to "take a moment to catch her own breath."

Guilmartin said she shared with the nurse the story of a friend who had been in and out of hospitals for a couple of years, and said she felt like nothing more than a "procedure" every time a harried nurse entered her room. The friend told Guilmartin she would appreciate being seen as a person first, and a patient second.

Guilmartin said the message resonated with the nurse, who did begin taking a breath before entering a patient's room.

There are a number of ways to be more successful and have more satisfaction

in work:

Don't react with angry words. Either verbally or written in an e-mail, "you give your power away when you get furious," she said. Instead, when frustrated or angry, pause and then try to regain control of the situation by getting more information. "It could be that you misunderstood, the person may have accidentally misspoken, or you don't fully understand all the issues involved."

Listen. The workplace is focused on developing a collaborative atmosphere where ideas are shared to drive innovation. That can't happen, she said, unless people take time to show respect by listening to another person without jumping in with snap decisions or judgments so they can move onto the next item on the list. "The greatest thing you can have someone say about you is: 'Wow. She's a great listener.'"

Be honest. "If someone comes to you and you're waiting on an important phone call, be honest and say that you can give them only 50 percent of your attention because you're focused on the upcoming call. Tell them if that's OK, you can give them what you can at the time. What this does is help the person come to trust you because you're being honest."

