

Insights from *Stillness is the Key* by Ryan Holiday

“(Stillness) inspires new ideas. It sharpens perspective and illuminates connections. Helps us resist the passions of the mob, makes space for gratitude and wonder. Stillness allows us to persevere. To succeed. It is the key that unlocks the insights of genius.” – Ryan Holiday

Reap the benefits of stillness by focusing on three domains: mind, body, and spirit.



Empty the Mind

“Journaling is spiritual windshield wipers, as the writer Julia Cameron once put it. It’s a few minutes of reflection that both demands and creates stillness... Journaling may turn out to be the most important thing you do all day.” – Ryan Holiday

Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist’s Way*, develops mental stillness each morning with a journaling practice called ‘Morning Pages.’ Each morning she fills three pages with longhand, stream of consciousness thought. **“As you write,”** Cameron says, **“you trap the muddy, maddening, confusing thoughts (nebulous worries, jitters and preoccupations) on paper so that you can face the day with clear eyes.”** What she writes is for her eyes only.

Brian Koppelman, screenwriter for the movie “Rounders” and TV show “Billions”, swears by his ‘Morning Pages’ practice and credits much of his professional success to his ‘Morning Pages’ daily ritual.

Steady the mind each morning by writing three pages of continuous thought on paper. After filling the three pages, throw them in the trash (or save them to review later) so you can start your day free from internal distraction.



Move the Body

In the mid-1920s, Winston Churchill signed a contract to produce a six-volume, 3,000-page account of World War I in addition to fulfilling his responsibilities as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Rather than power through the heavy workload and burnout, Churchill took up a new and rather odd form of leisure to rejuvenate his mind between blocks of work: bricklaying. The slow, methodical process of mixing mortar and stacking bricks was perfect for keeping his body busy while allowing his mind to unwind. Churchill’s daily regimen was to lay 200 bricks and write 2,000 words.

A generation before Churchill, British Prime Minister William Gladstone chopped down more than 1000 dying trees during his time in office. Gladstone found the process of chopping down trees completely consuming and said he had no time to think of anything but where the next stroke of his axe would fall.

The two men, Churchill and Gladstone, found stillness in a meditative physical activity. As their bodies executed a repetitive movement, their minds were restored.

What meditative physical activity can you lose yourself in and return to your work feeling mentally refreshed afterward? Whatever the activity, put it on the weekly calendar and schedule your work around it.



Satisfy the Spirit

“If you believe there is ever some point where you will feel like you’ve ‘made it,’ when you’ll finally be good, you are in for an unpleasant surprise. Or worse, a sort of Sisyphean torture where just as that feeling appears to be within reach, the goal is moved just a little bit farther up the mountain and out of reach. You will never feel okay by way of external accomplishments. Enough comes from the inside. It comes from stepping off the train. From seeing what you already have, what you’ve always had. If a person can do that, they are richer than any billionaire, more powerful than any sovereign.” – Ryan Holiday

Today, when you sit down to eat, reflect on the fact that the wealthiest person in the world a hundred years ago would envy you. They would give anything to have access to the technology you take for granted. They would marvel at your ability to access information on any topic, listen to an endless supply of music, and order a vast array of delicious food.

Stop envying others and start envying your own life. Ryan Holiday reminds us that, **“the factory worker wishes desperately to be a millionaire, the millionaire envies the simple life of the nine-to-five worker. The famous wish they could go back to the private life that so many others would gladly give away; the man or woman with a beautiful partner thinks only of someone a little more beautiful. It’s sobering to consider that the rival we’re so jealous of may in fact be jealous of us.”**

Cultivate a feeling of abundance throughout the day. Temporary hit pause on your desire for more and find stillness. In that stillness you’ll find more presence, more clarity, and more insight.