Daydream with a purpose

You'll likely learn nothing while reading this article. Well, you'll hopefully learn something, but it won't happen as you're reading these words and repeating them in your head. Instead, learning comes when something you read makes you pause and daydream about past experiences, current interests, important relationships, or future goals that relate to what you just read. In addition, you can use those lessons to help improve your performance and meet your goals.

Try it out. When was the last time you learned something valuable you could apply to your life? Maybe it was from a class you took, a book you read, or a video you watched. Where were you when you learned it? What made it meaningful? How did you feel when you learned it? And how has your life improved since?

If you just turned your attention away from reading and inward to recall past memories or imagine future scenarios, you activated the default mode network (DMN) in your brain. DMN is important for learning, creativity, self-reflection, empathy, and finding meaning in events. In comparison, you use the executive control network (ECN) of your brain to pay attention or complete a task.

You likely know the value of being able to focus on a task or job. Also, you've likely been frustrated with yourself, battle buddies, or loved ones for not paying attention. Have you ever read an entire article and—at the end—realized you had no idea what it said because you were daydreaming about something else? You might have felt frustrated because you had to reread it, but this article can help you learn that perhaps daydreaming was helpful at that particular time. You would have used ECN to read and remember what you read. However, you activated DMN instead and daydreamed about something else. Whether that time daydreaming was productive or not depends on the type of daydream: helpful or unhelpful.

Productive daydreams

Helpful daydreaming, or positive constructive daydreaming, happens when you free yourself of distractions and reflect on what you can learn. Or you might wonder how something might apply to your future goals. Maybe you think about how to creatively solve something, approach a situation differently, or explore how something might affect someone else. Productive daydreams help you grow from your experiences and achieve meaningful goals. However, not all forms of daydreaming have these benefits.

Unhelpful daydreams

Distracted daydreaming is when you turn your focus away from tasks and let your mind wander. For instance, you're attending a brief but can't remember what's being explained because you're thinking of your date tonight. Or you completely miss what your spouse just said because you're planning what your favorite football team has to do to win tomorrow's game. While distracted daydreaming can be fun and okay at times, it still can get in the way of getting things done.

Instead of focusing on a task, perhaps you're consumed with replaying frustrations, fears, or criticisms over and over. For example, you're distracted at work because you're chewing on an annoying comment your coworker made. Or you can't focus on a task because you're worried about what might happen if things don't go well. Or maybe you fail to enjoy a conversation with your kid because you're annoyed with how long the store cashier is taking to help the person in front of you. It can be productive to reflect on how you can learn from past problems or address future ones, which can boost your readiness and performance. However, it becomes unhelpful when negative thoughts are preventing you from problem-solving or focusing on the task at hand.

Daydream productively

Try these 3 strategies to help benefit from productive daydreaming.

- **Conduct personal after action reviews (AARs).** Productive daydreaming helps you learn. After attending a meeting, reading an article, or listening to a lecture, stop and ask yourself: What did I learn? How do I apply it to past experiences? And how can it help me in the future?

- **Put away technology!** You might not be giving yourself the chance to engage in helpful daydreaming because you pull out your phone as soon as you get the chance to reflect. Think about how often you're distracted by your phone, emails, social media, television, or talk radio throughout the day. Try to find time to free yourself from technology, so you can think. For example, maybe you take a walk after work or turn off the radio during your daily commute.

- **Change the channel when you're in an unhelpful daydream.** When your mind is wandering, ask yourself, “What
Bottom line

You can learn, grow, be creative, and achieve future goals with productive daydreams. To find ways to regularly daydream productively, read HPRC’s “Create good habits with these 4 easy strategies.” Also, practice mindfulness to help clear your mind and focus on the present if you’re having trouble breaking out of unhelpful daydreams.

Published on: October 1, 2019

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Did this information help change your opinion or perspective?

Yes  No  Not sure

References

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Your thoughts affect how you perform, especially when you face stressful situations that...
“Visualization: daydreaming with a purpose.” – Pen. tags: daydream, daydreaming, purpose, visualization, visualize. Daydreaming is an opportunity to do your best work, and become more of yourself. After all, living the life you've imagined starts with... imagining.

What does grown-up daydreaming look like? I have a wonderful memory as a kid: I was lying on the grass in the park in the summer, staring at the fluffy white clouds in the blue, blue sky, and daydreaming away. This is the daydreaming cliché, and as an adult, it's probably not realistic. But you do have something amazing at your disposal right now. Something that is more useful than the occasional full-on, cloud-staring daydream. - my bigger purpose in life. Seriously. I ask myself: What kind of life do I want to live? Daydreaming is the stream of consciousness that detaches from current external tasks when attention drifts to a more personal and internal direction. This phenomenon is common in people's daily life shown by a large-scale study in which participants spend 47% of their waking time on average on daydreaming. There are various names of this phenomenon including mind wandering, fantasy, spontaneous thoughts, etc. Daydreaming is the term used by Jerome L. Singer whose research programs laid the foundation.