

Today's women need to rediscover the meaning of downtime

MORE and more women are feeling pressured by time. We know that we need a break, but when we finally get one, our sense of responsibility has us chipping away at our "to do" lists. All the things we have been waiting to do "as soon as there is a little time" take priority, even during our vacation breaks.

I spoke to a woman today, for example, whose voice-mail message indicated she was away on vacation. But when I asked her how her vacation had gone, she laughed at my question. "What vacation?" she replied. "I was busy catching up with the details of my personal life all week I'm exhausted." My heart went out to her.

The meaning of vacation is changing in the 21st century. It no longer ensures a period of time for rest and leisure. Instead, even if we fly away to the mainland, our vacations are becoming activities that are out of our normal routine — but nevertheless, activity!

More and more of us are feeling pressured to get it all done but realizing the futility of ever having enough free time. I don't mean to be negative when I suggest that we might never manage to do everything on our "to do" lists. Because while it is the nature of the aspiring mind to grow and to prosper, we often suffer from a surreal sense of time distortion. The amount of time we believe that we need to do our tasks keeps getting shorter and shorter. Then,



THE GODDESS SPEAKS

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when the tasks take longer than we expected, many of us suffer from a sense of inadequacy because we feel like we are moving as fast as we can but are still unable to keep up.

I HAVE DISCOVERED two ways to keep myself balanced year after year. The first is to plan my downtime in accordance with my highest values. Instead of asking myself what I COULD do with my time over the weekend or during my vacation, I ask myself what I really WANT to do with my precious time.

The second thing I do is take a weekend each year to give myself just a little reprieve from the cycle of endless busy-ness. Every year, as the president of the Hawaii Wellness Institute, I design a weekend women's retreat to provide busy women with the unique opportunity to simply take care of themselves for a few days.

The annual Hawaii Wellness Women's Retreat provides an opportunity for women to come and be alone, to rest, to be pampered with spa treatments or to participate in classes that help each woman to refresh and rejuvenate. Some women come to meet new friends, while others choose to remain anonymous. We provide "in silence" badges for anyone who wishes to keep to themselves without being social.

We arrange to save breakfast for those who wish to sleep in; there are trails for those who would like to take a morning walk; and there are yoga and meditation classes for those who prefer a guided experience.

Optional workshops are provided all weekend to help each woman set the pace for a change in lifestyle when she returns to her routine. One of the most popular is a self-reflective workshop that guides women to prioritize the tasks they feel pressured by, because when a person is relaxed and thinking clearly, we can often find more creative ways to handle old challenges.

The retreat is held on Labor Day weekend, and overnight stays are optional. Those who live in Honolulu and would rather sleep in their own beds can come and go as they please. Because the retreat ends on a Sunday afternoon, there will still be a day and a half remaining to enjoy the long weekend.

If you need time alone, if you

haven't taken enough time with girlfriends to drink tea and laugh this year, if you enjoy eating tasty but healthy food or if you simply need a change of perspective, go to www.hawaii-wellnessinstitute.org and click

on the Upcoming Events site, or call the Hawaii Wellness Institute at 848-5544 to register.

Sunny Massad is president and founder of the Hawaii Wellness Institute. "The Goddess Speaks"

is a Tuesday feature by and about women. If you have something to say, write "The Goddess Speaks," 7 Waterfront Plaza, Suite 210, Honolulu 96813; or e-mail features@starbulletin.com