Time off with John Fitch and Max Frenzel

Jen Fisher (Jen): Hey, this is Jen. Before we get started with today's show, I have a quick ask of you. If the show has helped you in any way, please take a couple of minutes to rate and review the show, let us know what you think, let us know what has helped you, let us know what you want more of and what you want less of, but just take a couple of minutes to do that – it would mean a ton to me, and it will help us get better and better in the future. I really do want to hear from you.

You have heard me talk about the "badge of busy" on the WorkWell podcast before. The "badge of busy" is when you wear and communicate your busyness as a badge of honor, valuing a fully booked schedule over intentional time off for yourself and your loved ones. We often think that busyness and productivity go hand-in-hand, but the truth is that taking time off is one of the most overlooked tools we have to stimulate creativity, innovation, and focus, not to mention taking care of our own well-being. And we aren't just talking about vacations. Time off can come in many forms, so I ask, "When was the last time *you* intentionally took some time off?" This is the WorkWell podcast series.

Hi, I'm Jen Fisher, Chief well-being officer for Deloitte, and I'm so pleased to be here with you today to talk about all things of well-being. I am here with John Fitch and Max Frenzel, luminaries in the art and science of why we all need to create a rest ethic that matches our work ethic, and they are the co-authors of the book *Time Off*. John and Max, welcome to the show.

John and Max, I want to hear from both of you on this because I am fascinated by your stories and how you individually became passionate about time off, and then kind of how your worlds intersected with one another ultimately to write this amazing book that you have. So, John, I'll start with you.

John Fitch (John): Sure. I think, like a lot of people who resonate with our book, there is a breaking point, and I used to believe the only way to be successful was quantity of input, equal quality of output. And, for sure, I'm a recovering workaholic and I just totally believed the idea that I had to always be working. In one week, I had both a startup fail, and my relationship of many years end, and it was very humbling, dark week. Then, without going into the details of that maelstrom of sorrow, I had an opportunity through my vulnerability of sharing with people that I didn't know what was next, I had some mentors reach out to me and they said, "Hey, you want to move to New York and start a venture firm together?" I was looking for a change and so I did that. Little did I know that when we started the

company, I thought we were going talk about project plan, the funds we were going to raise, you know all of the work. But, the first weekend together we spent the whole time talking about culture. This was not by my decision – I was outnumbered by the other two, and we spent the whole time talking about our culture. It was very uncomfortable for me, and when I kept trying to change the subject to, "Now let's talk about the work and what we are going to do," Bettina Warburg, who I have to give credit to, looked at me in a very kind way and she said, "John, how has being that way worked out for you lately?" And so, I at least kind of put my tail between my legs and followed along. We ultimately decided that time off and intentional rest was going to be a huge part of our culture. We would work three months on being very focused on building software prototypes and investing in other startups and then after your three months' time, you would get a month off. And that was intentional, so that you could detach and re-think your position, have any epiphanies, and then come back refreshed, full of enthusiasm, with better ways of working identified. That was very foreign to me compared to my previous work experiences, and it was so meaningful that on that first sabbatical, I really started questioning my relationship to work and leisure that then led to an ongoing fascination with the concept of time off. I started a podcast and in my research for my early guest, I came across this incredible character online named Max Frenzel, and I read this article of his on *Medium* about the absolute essential nature of rest. He had summarized it with science in a way that I was kind of purely anecdotal leading to that point. Quite honestly, I was intimidated and instead of running away I said, "Well, I might as well have him on the podcast." We had such a great conversation on the podcast that we stayed in touch back and forth, and then ultimately, I wanted to ask if he wanted to write a book together. So yeah, I come from being very burnt out to the point of almost my life crumbling, and then luckily had some people expose me to the topic of time off as a part of culture, and that led now to kind of be the only thing I think about.

Max Frenzel (Max): Yeah, it's really interesting. I actually come from a very different, almost opposite, kind of background on my way of getting to "time off." When I did my PhD at Imperial College London, I did PhD in Physics, and I was extremely lucky with the group I was in and the people I was working with. I really owe a lot to my professors, David Jennings and Terry Rudolph, who was actually in the book – there is a of profile on him. But they gave me all the freedom I wanted; basically, it was a three-year deadline to finish my PhD, to get my PhD thesis done, but in between I could do whatever I wanted – I could disappear from the country for several weeks without even asking anyone for permission, I could just not work for a week if I didn't feel like my mind was really in the research. But I knew when I came back to it, I would be so fresh and have so many amazing ideas. At the same time I was doing my research, I was doing a lot of other things. I co-founded a startup, I trained for ultramarathon, I had all sorts of creative projects going on the side. At the time it just felt normal to me, I barely worked, I never felt busy, but I got a lot of stuff done. Once I finished my PhD, I decided to leave academia and join the startup world as an AI researcher. Slowly and gradually, I was just dragged into this startup hustle and busyness and grinding things out; I didn't even notice, and I didn't really notice that anything was wrong until I took a really slow trip. So, I was living in Japan and took this 10-day trip on only local trains through the mountains in Japan. I just thought it would be nice to have a nice holiday; I didn't think I needed to escape from anything or get away from the grind. During that time, it really hit me and it was one particular day where I realized just sitting in the mountains, looking out at the beautiful landscape, that, "Damn, never in my life have I felt more busy, but at the same time also less productive and creative." And

that's really when I realized, "Ok, something is wrong. Like I used to be both so creative and productive, but also never stressed. Like, what's changed? Why is this not my reality anymore?" And that's what started me thinking about this whole topic. So, I really come from the opposite. I experienced a time of rest, but then ended up forgetting about it and my way of getting back to it or trying to sort of reconcile that with the startup lifestyle. I still thought I liked my job, and it was a nice job in many ways, even though the culture was maybe not right. Trying to bring back what I felt I had lost – that's what started me on writing about the topic and, well, that's eventually how I ended up meeting John and how we ended up writing our book together.

Jen: So, John I have to ask you and you touched on it a little bit – on this first one-month sabbatical that you took, was the first week or two weeks weird? Did you know what to do with yourself?

John: It was very weird and my mentors gave me some books to read ahead of time. We kind of talked about it because they were preparing their time off as well, and so I kind of got to watch them do that with a lot of intention. So, I had a bit of positive examples leading up to it, but, yeah, I got a one-way ticket to Berlin, and then they told me have a question or something that I am seeking – it was very, very meta, Jen. I said, "I want to understand what quality time off means." So, I kind of felt like an investigator or a journalist all summer. I mean, I had an amazing time. I ultimately landed in Greece, which I think was the real moment. I visited this island, Ikaria, which I had read about in one of the books that my partners gave me called *Blue Zones*. It's a place with a lot of really old people, lot of longevity. With so many stories summarized, I got exposed to this idea of a separate form of time. Most people listening to this know the story of Kronos, so the watches on our hands – the minutes, seconds, deadlines, etc. It has its purpose and its utility, don't get me wrong, but the ancient Greeks also saw a separate form of time called Kairos, which was more about the opportune time, the density of a moment, not necessarily this linear time that we can stress ourselves out. So, I had some host from Ikaria who were basically like, "Look, if you over-subscribe to Kronos, you are going to be stressed out, which means you are going to have high cortisol levels and you are not going to have longevity." Hanging out with people that don't really pay attention to clocks is quite refreshing. It wasn't that they had it right, it was just that they looked at time differently and they waited for the opportune moment; they allowed themselves to be open instead of just completely obsessed with seconds, minutes, and hours. In a humbling moment, my host, she asked me, "When did I have all my greatest ideas as an entrepreneur and a technologist?" When I sat down and finally reflected on that, it was in the rare moments that I took time off. I was detached, I wasn't at my desk; I was doing something else and then it was like the universe has gifted me an idea, and then, of course, I had to go work on it. But this moment in Greece is when I finally kind of caught my stride. I didn't really have a choice; I just happened to in area of Greece where you can't really find watches and clocks. So that force function allowed me to really re-think my past but look forward to a new way of looking at time.

Max: It's funny. Greece actually has quite a strong impact on the book in many ways. I actually also spent three months in Greece writing my final PhD thesis and was extremely leisurely. We actually opened the book, not directly, but looking at ancient Greece and how we ended up forgetting what they valued so highly – this idea of "Noble Leisure" that originally came from Aristotle. Maybe one thing we should say is that we wrote a book about time off, but it is not a book about being lazy.

Jen: Right.

Max: The idea from Aristotle is like leisure was actually at the highest level of this hierarchy which he considered. So, at the bottom was rest and a lot of people today confuse rest with leisure. There is definitely a space for rest, but rest always asks the question, "Rest for what?" Usually, the answer is, "Well, to support more work." And then work is sort of at the middle of the hierarchy; it is necessary but is only there to support this highest of ideals as Nobel Leisure, and that's really anything that fills us with meaning. We use this Noble Leisure ideas almost like a guiding light for our book. That's also what we recommend to people when they think about, "What should I do with my time off?" Think about what fills your life with meaning, what gives you this sense of purpose. I think a lot of people are familiar with the idea of flow and flow states, and that's really an amazing form of time off because at the same time you're very active but it's still extremely energizing. Usually you get into a flow state when you engage in something that does fill you with meaning. So, I really encourage people to look for this idea of Nobel Leisure in their life.

Jen: Yeah, I love that Nobel Leisure, intentional time off. Right, I mean, taking time off for the sake of taking time off – there's a place for that. But, really being intentional about what you are doing with your time off. How has society's view of time off changed throughout history and why do you think that it is? What are the drivers of that?

John: Where do we start, Max? (Laughter).

Max: Yeah, exactly. It started way back before we even had civilization and all of that, and there are lot of good arguments for the fact that actually humans did not work very hard, like only a couple of hours of work every day, and that sustained the average hunter-gatherer. The rest of the time was really there for leisure, whatever that might have looked like in those days, but then fast-forward to ancient Greece and Rome, that was really where leisure was celebrated with something you should aspire to. People who had to work hard were not considered successful, which is really kind of the opposite of what we have today. Then a lot of things happened in between, but especially sort of around 17th century – that's kind of where this cultural perception of leisure really started to shift. There were a lot of things in between as well, without the perception of time, but things were becoming more about time – people working together across larger projects, you have to coordinate things and you have to actually have some shared sense of time, but then eventually what really made the biggest difference probably was this, well, Protestant work ethic and it elevated work to this sacred thing that we still think today, in some ways. It was really just using religion as an excuse or as a cover for this idea of making work the most important thing. It was really just a bunch of rich people, the upper classes, being worried that the poorer people wouldn't know what to do with their leisure time if they were given too much of it. So, instead of having them drunk and rioting, they just used religion as this cover story for, "Hey, God gave you this valuable time on planet Earth, so don't waste it. Work for His sake." Over the centuries, we did end up forgetting this idea of the sacred, meaning the religious association, in some way. But we never forgot about this relation of guilt we have with not working, sort of leisure, or slacking off, or time off as a sin almost. We don't think in religious terms, at least most of us don't think in those terms anymore, but the feeling is still deeply there. I think that's one of the biggest issues, and one thing we really want to address is getting rid of that guilt people associate with not working and reframing it instead as seeing time off as an investment into productivity, and into your creativity. Because soon that's the only thing that is going to be left. AI and automation are taking over more and more. No one, no matter how hard they work, or how many hours they put in, is going to

"out-busy" the machines. We should just accept that and actually celebrate it because that frees us up to focus on creativity and empathy, and those things that make us really human and also give us meaning in our lives. So, I think it should be quite obvious why business leaders should really deeply care about that. Everyone prides themselves on like how innovative the company they are, but few people actually really do the work to foster a culture of innovation, which should also be a culture of time off.

Another concept we talk about a lot in the book the idea of a rest ethic. Everyone is kind of aware of work ethic, and a lot of people pride themselves on their work ethic and that's good – there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. But we suggest that you should supplement that with an equally well-established rest ethic. We would like to think of those two things actually as sort of "inhale and exhale." The work ethic is to inhale – it's getting things done, it is going down your task list, but you can only keep inhaling for so long. A lot of people have forgotten that – they try to keep inhaling, inhaling, inhaling, and that's how you get to burnout. Especially right now, the huge issue is that all the boundaries are disappearing between work and rest, and a lot of people struggle as a result. Now more than ever, they need this rest ethic; they need to really take their rest as seriously as their work and pride themselves in it. We will also call it "rest ethic" because it is not always easy as probably everyone right now has realized. Resting well and taking that seriously actually, counterintuitively, takes quite a bit of work – at least it takes quite a bit of thinking and preparation. For example, this is probably the advice that everyone is giving right now, but it is very true you should really schedule your rest, just like you schedule a work meeting, and be just as serious about actually committing to it because otherwise it's not going to materialize. Also, good rest is not the same as mindlessly swiping down on Instagram or something; good rest is much more deliberate, and it is really about being conscious of how you use your time. And again, ideally it comes back to the idea of Nobel Leisure and filling your life and your time off with meaningful activities – those are the ones that really give you a lot of detachment from your work, and that's really what you're looking for. They also just energize you overall again.

Jen: Well, and you got into my next question, which was going to be about the coinciding of work ethic and rest ethic. Ever since I read the book and have been talking about the concept of rest ethic, everybody is just grateful that we have something to name it. It is something we can define in some way, and it is just really resonated with me, which is probably why I can't stop talking about it. But it seems to be resonating with everybody that I've talked to about it. So, John, I'm going to put you on the spot, and Max you are next but I'm going to give you a couple of minutes to think about it. Can you share your personal rest ethics with us?

John: Yeah, that's awesome. Look, I'm probably more on the range of a type A personality. I like to achieve, I like to make things, I like working. So, what was important for me in the book, which has changed my life regarding rest ethic, is that I gave it a vocabulary. In the book, we have a chapter on the creative process in time off. There are four phases that all of us experience in this creative expression: there is preparation, incubation, illumination, verification. The middle two, incubation and elimination, you have to detach from the actual work to have happen. Now that I have words for it, I can still be my type A personality when I go do a rest ethic activity; I'm able to not feel guilty because I can say, "I am incubating." I do feel like a point…

Jen: I feel you, my friend. You are speaking my language. [Laughter].

John: Awesome, well hopefully some others resonate that. Use that with your team like, "Hey, it's time for some incubation time," or "Hey, now what I want you to go do is incubate on that for a while." I have changed a lot of my rest ethic. I used to work in these cycles that I mentioned earlier of a few months of just like really focused, quality work ethic and then give myself these extended forms of time off, whereas now my season in life has changed. For example, I have two puppies now. I know that's not anything close to having children, but you know it's a little bit of new responsibility put into my lap, and it's a very cute responsibility, too. I had to change my oscillation between that inhale and exhale. So, now my time off is more micro-practices: I have a few things in the morning; I have a very intentional "reflection practice" that I call it. I follow this book called *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor* – it is all about stoicism and there are several journal prompts, so I have this sort of stillness in the morning, or I have some tea and I go through that a reflection exercise, which always helps me get to like some kind of essentialism – it could be related to work, could be in my personal life, but it kind of sets the tone and lets me re-orient. And it enables me to define what matters to me at that time. So that's a non-negotiable; I don't immediately default to inbox, I don't let the world come to me; instead, I have a moment where I objectively, at a very high altitude, observe the world and that's a micro practice that is very consistent. Then, I also kind of shut things down on the weekend, so I work on computers a lot, I mean we all do now because of virtual [work], but lately on the weekends I just try to get away from screens as much as possible and time kind of slows down. I let myself get bored in a way; I say that in a positive way. So, this last weekend I was practicing calligraphy; I am really terrible at it, but I was trying. It was meditative and then, Max knows, I love cooking. I think all of us on here love cooking. I'll spend kind of all-day preparing one meal. Meaning, I'll go to the farmer's market to get the goods, and then really kind of take my time making a meal. So those are things that, again, they're not profound, but they are a part of my schedule and I protect them. They are deliberate. Then I make sure for all of these time off practices, whatever yours are as well…so, we mentioned that in creative process, there is incubation, then followed by illumination. It's important. I would say, "Hey, if I was to make a 3.5 version, if I was to add an interstitial, it would be integration." So, we had these "A-ha's," meaning we have these epiphanies in our time off, but it is important to document it, to think about how you're going to put it into practice. I have this little concept of "lessons identified" versus "lessons learned." My time off will help me identify a lesson, but I have to either document a new protocol, or behavior, or eliminating something, and then it's learned – then can I say it's learned. That's something that is really important for all of us to think about – is your time off practices, your rest ethic is something that is going to give your perspective. It really will, and it's important to document it and then implement it, otherwise it's an epiphany that is just gone in the wind.

Jen: I have some follow up questions, but Max I want to hear from you first.

Max: So, John, what you said about vocabulary, I think is very true, and especially it's probably the best way for, as you say kind of "type A" personalities, to understand this – me included there. Time off, if you frame it right, it's really an investment in getting more stuff done, in achieving more. It's not detracting from it. I hope that with all the profiles in the book – we actually hired a lot of people who are extremely successful because of time off, not in spite of it. Also, another thing I should probably say, at least speaking for myself, but I'm pretty sure it's true for John as well. We wrote this book about time off, but even for us improving our rest ethics, sticking to our rest ethic, is still a daily struggle, especially right now in these changing times.

To me, probably the most constant things I've had in my life for very long time, I think even before we started writing the book, my mornings and evenings for me are very special. I get up in the morning, I make a cup of coffee, and then I sit down with a book and a notebook and just read for an hour and take notes. So, my mornings are reserved for reading nonfiction. Only after that do I slowly turn on my electronic devices. Similarly, in the evening, an hour before going to bed, I switch off everything electronic and again I sit down with a book, but this time with fiction, just to kind of switch off my mind and get myself ready to go to sleep – prepare myself for dreaming almost. In between, it really varies quite a bit, it changes overtime. As John said, it kind of changes with the season of your life you are in, but it also changes a lot depending on the projects I'm working on.

There are different kinds of cycles. When we were still working on the book, I reserved my mornings for purely output and purely writing, and then focus the afternoon on my main day job. Now, it's a little bit different. Now, I'm more focused on like spending the whole day on my main job, but then in between having these pockets of working on book related things, or also having these different rest activities. For me, there are many different things. I really enjoy running or exercise in general, like any form of exercise. It can be a hard workout at the gym, or it can be running. Also, it's about how hard I want to go. Sometimes it's more meditative, whereas other times it is actually a way of moving and at the same time thinking about a problem. But, when I feel really stuck with something, going for a run is extremely helpful for me to reset and come back in refreshed to see the problem in a new way. Like, my subconscious mind – I give it some time to incubate and think about the problems.

But then there is more kind of smaller things: I produce music, so if I feel like I need a little bit of a break, I just play around with some music for a couple of minutes and that often refreshes me. Again, it's kind of getting your brain completely detached from the problem you are actually working on, on to something else that really needs your full attention. But that actually resets your brain on the original problem or makes your subconscious view it in a completely different way, kind of zoom out. Creatives, and I guess as knowledge workers, well in some way we are all creative workers, will realize that. Creativity is all about connecting the dots. If you're stuck with your head all the time in the problem, you're not going to connect the distant, the interesting dots. You are just going to be connecting nearest neighbor dots and come up with stale, boring ideas. So, anything that can get your mind out of it is really valuable.

Just one more thing, I really enjoy, especially now that we're working basically from home all the time – I have been into baking sourdough bread for very, very long time. I realized recently a lot of people got into it as well because the flour is sold out everywhere. But that's a really nice process for me because I have these very scheduled breaks. Like, I do something for a couple of minutes on the bread, then I let it sit for an hour. Then I, again, do something for a couple of minutes on the bread, kneading it or whatever needs to be done, and then I can get back to work. It is this very scheduled intervals of, "Okay, I know I have one hour to work, and then I have these 15 minutes of working on the bread." It is almost meditative. But this clear cycle is very, very productive for me, and this hour in between is actually some of my most productive time. So, those are just some of the things I have in my rest ethic. As I said, it is constantly changing and it's a constant learning and improvement process.

Jen: So, what I took from all of that, is that you were making sourdough bread before it was cool. [Laughter.]

Max: I tried not to say it that way, but that was basically what I was trying to get at. [Laughter.]

Jen: In listening to both of you, neither one of you mentioned some sort of grand vacation. Max, you talked about your practice of reading fiction in the evening to help you prepare for sleep, but neither one of you directly talked about sleep. What I am getting at is I think when most people think of time off or rest, they think of vacation and sleep. So, discuss please. [Laughter.]

John: You caught on. Early on in discussions when Max was like, "Yeah, let's write a book together." Then there was this like funny a week or two where we were like tapping our fingers like, "Okay, what do we write about?" In our early discussions, we were like we want to make sure we expand the connotation of time off. Because, as we found out in early interviews just asking people, and just day-to-day, people default into, no fault other than culture, vacation. And that's a yes, *and* it's also these other types of time off. To me, that's what our real goal was: to expand the definition of it, so that people could realize their intentional practice, their rest ethic, could be more achievable, even if you have a work culture that maybe isn't so generous with vacation time, knowing that there is still so much in your control. Of course, we've got some awesome ideas in the book on how to take vacation to another level and call them micro-vacations or micro-retirements. I'm all for it. You know, we would be naive in ignorance to think that's the only way to get the benefits. There are these micro-practices. I know you're familiar with Arianna Huffington's work and I think she calls them "micro-steps," and I think that's brilliant. It was a book on like time off micro-steps, if you will. There are some macro-steps in there, too, but I think Max and I overtime have become more champions of those smaller doses, those micro-doses of time off, because it is like any behavior you change. If you have a simple, small goal, you achieve it and then you want more, and you want to push it further and further. So I found that just more micro-practices of time off has also increased my ideation of some more macro time off practices. I mean, this summer after we launched our book, I still needed to work, but I realized that I can work differently. So, my entire summer, I was camping out west, normally in Texas but I was out in the western parts of the United States, where I spent most of my day, if people were to objectively look at my calendar, they would think I'm like a hiking bum who is going out on adventures. I was fitting in meaningful work, but what was first and foremost was like adventure and leisure. I gained that confidence because of my micro time off practices. And again, we are all in different seasons of life. I know friends that are young parents right now, not dog parents like me but like human parents, and their time off practices have to be a lot more micro.

Max: Just to add a few thoughts to that. First of all, when we wrote the book, we still believe that there is no one size fits all approach to how you design your rest ethic and what kind of leisure and time off activities are valuable to you. Everyone has to answer that for themselves. For some people, that might be the big vacation – that might be the main thing that actually is part of their rest ethic, although I think that's rather unlikely. But kind of to what John said about these micro-habits, and this idea of micro-dosing of time off almost.

One of my favorite profiles in the book is on Hermann Hesse. He was a German poet and novelist. He essentially said if you can't enjoy the little moments, if you can't enjoy the little things in life, then the big ones like the big vacation – they will feel great in the moment, but afterwards they might leave you even more empty. So, it is almost like you have to prepare yourself or train yourself with those micro-practices to actually make full use of those bigger practices, those bigger occasions. He said something wonderful; we have to go

into the book, but I think it was like, "For someone who for first time picks up a flower on his way to work makes a big step towards joy." When we think about joy or time off, as you said we always think of these grand things like a long adventure vacation or something, but we should really start seeking much smaller things. Just seeing something that brings joy to you and actually noting it down, that's a really good practice. Just like if you can everyday write down three things that kind of make you smile, that's a great rest practice and kind of micro time off practice. Start small and then build up to the bigger things. There's absolutely nothing wrong with the vacation.

On the sleep side, I think that is actually the one universal thing that probably everyone should have in their rest ethics. Maybe we didn't mention it more specifically earlier, but that's just because it's so universal. I know I'm absolutely terrible if I get less than 7 hours of sleep because then my next day is completely useless. If I get less than 8 hours, it's not going to be an amazing day. I need my 8 to 9 plus hours to be really happy.

Jen: You and me both. [Laughter.]

Max: Awesome. I think, again, a lot of leaders should actually really take this much more seriously. I think we probably all know a terrible leader, who is very reactive, doesn't listen to their team properly, is just a pain to work with. Often, those are exactly the same people who pride themselves on how little sleep they need, on how they grinding things out all the time, and on how busy they are, right? I think to be an effective leader, sleep is probably the one universal thing that everyone should have as part of their rest ethic, and most of us are just not getting enough of it.

Jen: In some ways, I think you answered what I was going to ask you next: what do you say to the people who say I don't have time for time off, or I don't have time for rest, or I don't have time for sleep?

John: If I am going to look at it through the lens of the book, the chapter that has been resonating with me a lot post-book launch is the "Reflection" chapter. If you feel like you don't have the time, then that means someone else has your time. Is that culture, is that your boss, what is it? Identify that first, and then second, you can peel back the onion and do you feel trapped? Do you feel like you have a lot of meaning? Are you creating space for the things that bring you meaning? Those hard questions that you can sit with for a long period of time with yourself, I think that is the first step. If you don't have time, I would ask them why don't you have time? Write that out. What is keeping you away from it? Is it truly external, like you're being forced to not be able to have time off? Is it because you and your partner haven't found a way to co-parent more successfully? Have you not requested that you need time off, therefore it's kind of your own fault? There are a lot of reflections one can do, and that would be my first step. One of my favorite activities from our reflection chapter – I do this all the time, both in my personal life as well as professional and on various scopes and altitudes. It is a "more of, less of" list. So, I identify what are things that I want more of in my life – it is typically time off or rest ethic type things, you know like deeper connections with certain people or more creative expression. Then, I also talk about what I want less of. Those are things that don't make me feel good in my life. When I do that, it makes it very clear what's on the left side of the paper and what's on the right side of the paper. You start realizing that a lot of it is actually in your field of influence, but you just haven't identified it and therefore done something about it. If someone really feels that way, you can email me, it's john@timeoffbook.com and I would be happy to walk through an exercise. I have a lot of reflection prompts. Anyone who feels trapped, I empathize. I

have felt trapped, but I was trapping myself. I have a feeling most people are doing the same, or they haven't had the courage yet to speak up to maybe an externality that is keeping them away from it and I'm happy to help.

Max: I think you got that completely right. I don't really have much to add, but just one thing on the reflection side as well. I think one issue about understanding how important time off is, is that it is a little bit of a chicken and egg problem actually because you only really realize how much you need time off once you start taking the time off to reflect or just to get away from things. Only that's when it hits you how busy you actually are, how many problems that busyness is causing. Just one other exercise that I think is very interesting and I think that actually comes from John as well is to ask yourself a simple question: "Is all my hard work actually working?" It seems like a very trivial question at the beginning, but if you do the work and sit down with it for 10 minutes, 20 minutes, or 30 minutes, you might actually get very deep and uncover some things that might be a bit uncomfortable but really will get you ahead. Also, maybe reflect on, "When do you actually feel the most accomplished?" I can say for myself, from my own experience, I don't feel the most accomplished on my busiest days. Those days, I just forget them afterwards. Well, maybe on the same evening. The days when in the evening I look back and think, "Yes, okay, I made a really big break through. This was a very important day. I really achieved something." On those days, I actually often didn't work all that much; it was maybe just two, three, or four hours at most. Maybe I was even out in nature hiking or something, but I had a key breakthrough idea, and I sit down for an hour afterwards just integrate it. Those big breakthroughs rarely come on those busy days. Reflect for yourself, "When do you feel the most accomplished?" Try and get more of that in your life, and chances are that will automatically bake some more time off into your life.

John: I am going to add to that Max. You just inspired me that all of us have to think about where work is heading even. Max and I, well Max more than I, we've both spent a decent amount of time in the world of artificial intelligence, and in the commercialization of it. If you are doing machine-like work, so I'm going to say anything that takes 10 seconds or 5 seconds or less of your thought to execute, that's likely a workflow or a task that a machine – if it's not already doing better, will do better very soon. Yet, if you've heard all of us on this interview, we talk about these breakthrough moments, these "a-ha" moments. In a way, we are artists, we are like designers, the value we produce isn't output like a machine. Rather, it is like we invent something out of thin air, like an artist. And in a future where we're all more artist-like, our book will show you this, but just watch a bunch of documentaries on artists of any medium, and their non-working time is essential for their breakthroughs. In the future of work, where we are all artists, see these micro-practices of time off as like you are upskilling yourself for what's left for us humans as the machines execute the mundane much more effectively.

Jen: It's similar. I mean, you hear athletes say that as well. The breakthroughs, in terms of their athletic performance, come after they have been very intentional about what they do when they are not training, so in their time off.

Max: Actually Jen, I love that you mentioned athletes because they are the ones who already really take rest seriously. Their coaches really take rest extremely seriously and they know to perform at their best when it really matters, they need to be very, very strict and have a very good rest ethic essentially. So, I think top performers in all kinds of fields should compare themselves more with athletes. I think that's already comparisons that

happen, but somehow in the comparison we often lose that rest component. We should really look at like how serious those people take sleep for example.

Jen: I think of airline pilots or truck drivers – they force them to rest and get sleep because nobody wants to fly on a plane with a sleep-deprived pilot. I certainly don't! When I get back to flying, and that will come one day. I know it will. [Laughter].

John: Jen, I have a question for you. In our early conversations, you definitely resonated with like "recovering workaholic" that we both resonate with. Now that you have not only the knowledge of our book, but so many other people that love this topic and live this topic – if you were to talk to the former version of yourself that didn't see the value in time off as much, that felt like they didn't have the time for it. In your own words to that former version of yourself, I'm just curious, what kind of things would you say to that older version of Jen that needed some perspective?

Jen: I certainly subscribed to the thinking that, "I would have plenty of time to sleep when I was dead." I think that is taught to us. In many ways, or at least it was with me. I think slow down, recognize the little things that light me up that happen without us taking notice most of the time because we are so busy. Take the time to recognize, to appreciate, and to celebrate those things. I think the biggest thing is slow down, especially when it comes to work, but also really in a lot of aspects of life. I think things come when they are supposed to and trying to force them or make them happen doesn't work. It doesn't make them happen any sooner, or any better, or any faster, or any quicker. To be honest, it's a lesson I continue to learn, even though I have been there. I'm better at recognizing it sooner, meaning when I'm trying to force something. But it doesn't mean that I don't still try. I think as a cancer survivor, as somebody who has been through burnouts, it is a cliché but it is 100% true that if we don't have our health, none of what we are talking about matters. Being a cancer survivor, being somebody who has been through chemotherapy, when your body and your brain force you, you have no choice but to rest because you just can't physically or mentally do anything else.

John: Thanks for sharing, Jen. That's really beautiful. I think it just comes down to increasing our awareness through vocabulary. I think we all feel these things but giving it as many awesome words as we have, using cool acronyms and the business world of doing things. I think we can make rest just as cool by dissecting it in the correct way and spotlighting its contribution to effectiveness.

Max: Absolutely. I really think we have a shared mission. Thank you already for all the amazing work you are doing. We really wrote this book for everyone, but who we really hope to reach are business leaders who cannot only make a difference in their own life but for the entire team. Just change the culture we're living in. That would be at the greatest thing for us to achieve.

John: Jen, we had talked about this when getting to know each other for this podcast. To Max's point, if you are a leader and you are going to have a call tomorrow, likely some kind of video call, change things up. Instead of the typical, "How was the weekend?" and you get the typical robot response, "Oh, it was good, it was chill." Instead, go deeper, actually ask each person on your team, "Hey, what do you do in your free time? What did you get into this weekend?" Don't let it stop after the surface-level answer. Investigate further and ask them like, "Why do you that? Why do find so much meaning in that?" You'll see people's eyes light up because you're honoring what makes them, them. And what makes them

interesting, and any of us who lead can recognize that is the lifeblood of creativity and enthusiasm. Like, what else can you ask for of your team other than to have people show up with enthusiasm? So, by honoring people's time off practices, by just talking about them more, not telling you to commit to a new time off policy yet, but just by being curious of your team's time off practices will uncover their interestingness, and therefore you might be able to bring that into work in a much more intentional way and feel less stressed or guilty when they are stepping away because you can recognize the value in it. That starts just through a simple conversation.

Max: I love that, and it kind of brings us full circle because I think to be the leader who has this deeper conversation, who has this empathetic connection to their team, you actually need a lot of time off and rest. Because if you're not well rested, you are going to have a lot more resistance to even going deeper and having that conversation, so it is really a nice circle that we just discussed there.

Jen: I can't think of a better way end, so thank you both, Max and John, so much for this incredible conversation. I know that I am taking a lot of way from it, as I did with your book, and will continue to learn from the two of you. I just appreciate your work and the two of you so very much.

Max: Thank you so much for having us and for doing the amazing work that you are doing.

Jen: I'm so grateful John and Max could be with us to talk about all things time off.

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