

Movement for Rest and Restoration

Introverted Perspectives

by Dan Bulgarelli, PAC Mentor Coach

Before I joined PAC in the summer of 2015, I taught middle school social studies for ten years. Generally, when I have told people this I get funny looks or comments such as “you’re a brave man” or “that must have been tough.” The honest truth is that I loved it... most of the time. I truly cared about each and every one of my kids and I enjoyed working with them. However, teaching class after class after class with lunch duty thrown in the middle got to be tough for me. You see, I’m an introvert. That means I need time to myself to truly relax. What most people don’t understand about teaching, or Care Partnering for that matter, is that you have to be ON. You need to be aware of not only yourself, but of those you are working with, as well as the environment around you. It is exhausting, but we do it because we truly care about them.

Without breaks being built in to my day I found myself wearing down, becoming much more irritable, and not putting forth the effort I knew I needed to give and the level of attention my kids deserved. Breaks throughout the day certainly help, but I needed more. That’s when I turned to exercise.

I didn’t start exercising because I thought it would be good for me mentally; I started exercising to try and undo the combined effects of comfort foods and flopping on to the couch out of sheer exhaustion at the end of the day. What I found was that it helped me in so many more ways than I had thought.

I joined the local gym and when I walked in I was a bit overwhelmed. There were a lot of people there! I was afraid to start, thinking people would watch me, maybe even laugh. What I found, however, was that once I put my headphones on and started on the treadmill, everyone seemed to disappear. I quickly realized cardio and music don’t work for me like it works for others. I started to download podcasts and audiobooks and I would get lost in the stories. This freed up my mind and I stopped focusing on what had happened in third period and felt the stress roll off of me in the form of sweat. When I moved to the weights or whatever else I was doing, I quickly realized I wasn’t paying attention to anyone and no one seemed to be paying attention to me. Everyone had their headphones on and was doing their own thing. The gym may be the best public place for an introvert! I found this to be true even in group class settings. Whether it was spin or CrossFit, everyone is focused on their own performance; I never felt like I was expected to interact with others. Exercise became a bit of a respite for me. I started looking forward to it, particularly during that difficult third period I mentioned before. I knew when I left the gym, my body would be tired, my mind would be refreshed, and I could tackle whatever was coming next.

Another bit of exercise that helped me in more ways than just physical activity is when my wife introduced me to hiking. That may sound strange, but the only bit of hiking my family ever did was around a golf course with our bags on our back. If you’d ever seen

my swing, you'd know I still spent a fair amount of time in the trees! In all seriousness, I didn't realize just how refreshing a hike could be. The fresh air, the beautiful views, the physical exertion (if you choose that kind of trail) cleared my mind. There have been multiple studies showing the connection between time spent in nature and a surge of positive feelings as well as increased cognitive performance. It was amazing to me how when I wasn't focused on a problem at work, answers that I hadn't even considered starting popping into my head. On top of that, when you are hiking through the woods, up a mountain, around a lake, or wherever you may be, the feeling of solitude can be exhilarating.

At the end of a day, particularly a difficult one, it is easy for an introvert to want to go home, slip on the comfy clothes, pour a glass (or two) of wine, and eat delicious (generally unhealthy) food. The laws of inertia work against us in this way; a body at rest tends to stay at rest. It is much harder to start a new routine than it is to maintain one. From one introvert to another, I will tell you that – while it isn't easy to start – getting out to exercise, whether it is walking/jogging around the neighborhood, hitting up the gym, or taking a walk in nature will help you mentally as much as physically. We can get inertia back on our side as a body in motion tends to stay in motion; you will generally sleep better, feel more refreshed the next day, and start on a positive note.

Additional Resources

[Hiking Changes Your Brain in These 3 Powerful Ways!](#)

[How Walking in Nature Changes the Brain](#)

[How Hiking Changes Our Brains—And Makes Us Better Travelers](#)

[Doctors Explain How Hiking Changes Your Brain In These 3 Powerful Ways!](#)