

Hard Work is Overrated (Why You Might Be Working Too Hard)

Description

*Lazy can be good
Strive for max efficiency
Not so easy, eh?
(Why the [haiku](#)? [TMQ](#))*

There seems to be this widespread notion that hard work is commendable and worthy of praise, while laziness is at the root of society's problems.

Kids underachieving in school? Well, kids nowadays don't have any work ethic. Childhood obesity? Get those lazy farts on a treadmill. Bad customer service? Fire those good for nothing slackers. Not fulfilling our potential? Tired of being a big fat failure and seeing others succeed? Well, stop being so lazy!

Sheesh. Why does laziness get such a bad rap?

As someone who has long considered himself to be fundamentally "lazy", I think hard work and pure willpower are overrated. Frankly, I don't think the benefits of laziness get enough credit.

So let's take a look at some of the benefits of being a slacker.

#1 Being lazy saves time and energy

The lazy person is fundamentally opposed to doing more work than is necessary. So, the lazy person is more likely to find the absolute most efficient way to get something done.

And not only is the slacker more likely to find the most efficient way to get something done, but it's probably going to get done in such a way that it stays done. Because for the slacker, there is nothing worse than having to waste time and energy maintaining or fixing something that should have been done right the first time.

The slacker will probably spend an inordinate amount of time trying to look for some sort of technical trick, shortcut, or qualitatively different approach rather than practicing the same passage over and over with only tiny incremental progress over time. Far better to experiment with and find an unusual, but more effective fingering, than to keep hammering away at a more conventional one that remains hit or miss. Or a more natural bowing. A better way of spacing out breaths. A more effective way of practicing. A more streamlined warm up. Heck, better strings, rosin, mouthpiece, and the list goes on...

The slacker figures that if there is an easier way to do upbow and downbow staccato, it's worth finding – even if it takes more time up front. If there's a way to memorize music more effectively in less time, it's worth spending more time finding it, or figuring it out, than doing it the old way.

And yes, the slacker realizes that one could search forever for the mythical pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, so at some point the slacker will get tired of making excuses, buck up, and get the job done instead of continuing to look for more things to try.

The mindset: “There must be a better/easier way” (because there almost always is)

#2 Being lazy is more productive

The slacker tends to be more focused on the task at hand. Since working for no good reason is annoying and feels like a waste of time, the slacker avoids doing work mindlessly on autopilot. The slacker is either going to get something of value out of the time and energy expended, or not bother expending any time or energy in the first place.

Thus, the slacker will generally want to know the reason or purpose behind the expenditure of effort up front. The slacker will want an answer to the question of “why”. Why should I play scales? Why should I play this piece? Why should I practice today? Why should I play this section through 10 times a day? In this regard, the slacker can be annoying, because the slacker doesn't do something just because someone else said to do it. Does this mean all 4-year-olds are slackers? Hmm...

The mindset: “What's the point?” (because if we don't know, we're not likely to be all that invested or focused in the task at hand)

#3 Being lazy results in a higher level of musicianship

In a similar vein, the slacker tends to start with the end in mind, so as to make sure they are not wasting time meandering in the wrong direction.

For instance, the slacker would rather take a piece and figure out what they want it to sound like first, and then figure out the technical requirements necessary for making this a reality, as opposed to getting the notes learned, slapping some “musicality” on top, and discovering that there's additional work to be done, now that the slacker is playing it differently. A conductor once told me that Horowitz approached a piece by figuring out the music first, and letting that guide his technical agenda second. Perhaps Horowitz was a slacker?

The mindset: “What do I want the end result to be like?” (because if we don't know where we want to go, we're liable to end up where we're headed instead)

#4 Being lazy results in a higher level of performance

The slacker doesn't see the point of doing sub-par work. Why do anything halfway? Why go through the motions, or engage in a project if it's not going to be of much value? Why do something that can't be great, or at the very least be a stepping stone or provide a learning experience that eventually leads to something great?

The slacker prefers to pick a project that *is* worth doing if for no other reason than it resonates with them on some deep level. The slacker does things that are personally meaningful, even if the outcome isn't necessarily going to be stellar – but avoids like the plague those things that everyone else says the slacker “should” do, but which don't resonate with the slacker.

Though there's something to be said for constant exposure to new repertoire and different styles, at some point one realizes that there are some things that resonate and some that don't. *This* particular slacker doesn't “get” contemporary repertoire like Schoenberg, but does “get” stuff like Arvo Part. This slacker “gets” Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Paganini, and Wieniawski, but not so much Brahms or Tchaikovsky. The slacker sees more value in following their strengths, and those things that naturally resonate (aka the path of least resistance), as this is where the slacker is most likely to have the motivation and wherewithal to be successful and advance their field in some way (and find personal fulfillment to boot).

The mindset: “I might as well do it right if I'm going to do it at all” or “Never mind what I *should* do, what do I truly *want* to do?” (because if we don't feel like something is worthwhile, it's probably not going to get done all that well)

#5 Being lazy helps one fulfill their potential

The slacker is too lazy to stress about all the little things. And rather than running around trying to do everything, the lazy person focuses on the most important things, and lets the less important things go. The slacker knows that somebody else who has more time (or is less lazy) will probably pick up the slack anyway, and often, whatever it was didn't really need doing in the first place.

The slacker realizes that saying “yes” to something, means they are also saying “no” to other things, so the slacker makes sure to say “no” on a regular basis and thereby picks up more time to focus on high-value targets.

The mindset: “What's the one thing, if I get it done efficiently and effectively, will move me closer to where I want to be in 5 years than anything else?” or “Will this matter to me in 5 years?” (because what's urgent is not necessarily the same as what is important)

#6 Being lazy makes the world a better place for everyone

In the words of author [Agatha Christie](#), “I don't think necessity is the mother of invention. Invention, in my opinion, arises directly from idleness, possibly also from laziness – to save oneself trouble.”

And according to [Walter Chrysler](#) (of the automotive company which bears his name), “Whenever there is a hard job to be done I assign it to a lazy man; he is sure to find an easy way of doing it.”

So considered together, one might say that the slacker makes things easier for everyone else by finding more effective, efficient ways of doing things and identifying shortcuts for the rest of us to use, so we can spend less time spinning our wheels and more time getting things done.

The mindset: “How can I do more with less?” (not to do substandard work, but to do the same or better quality of work because you are maximizing efficiency and ease)

#7 What else?

I’m sure there are more benefits to laziness. I know this of course, because I’m probably too lazy to think of them all. What did I miss?

Take action

(1) Always look for an easier, more efficient way.

Is there a slightly easier way to wash dishes? Make up the bed? Arrange your sock drawer? Fold shirts? Remember to take your vitamins? Almost invariably, there’s an easier, faster, more effective way – so long as you are stubborn or persistent (or lazy) enough to find it.

(2) Work with your laziness, don’t fight it.

Look for natural points of resistance, and use these for your benefit. For instance, if you have a weakness for tortilla chips, resistance is lowest at home when there’s an open bag sitting right in front of you. Resistance is slightly greater when the bag sits on the highest shelf in your pantry which requires you to take the step-stool out of the closet. Hide the step-stool somewhere inconvenient, so that your laziness wins out and you decide not to eat the chips. Resistance is even greater if you have to go out into the cold to grab a bag at the store. You probably hate going out into the cold more than you like eating chips, so the easiest way to avoid eating chips is to ensure they never end up in your grocery bag in the first place.

(3) Manage your environment and reduce barriers to action.

Make it easier to practice by taking away excuses. Keep your instrument out, somewhere where it’s instantly accessible, with the music and everything else ready to go. That’s one less barrier we have to hop over when it comes time to practice.

Plus, your goal needn’t be to practice for 2 hours, 1 hour, or even 20 minutes. This can just lead to procrastination. Try making it your goal to merely pick up the instrument and play a scale. Immediately, your resistance to playing will drop a notch, and before you know it, you’ve gotten sucked into the practice

session and may find it easier to keep practicing than to stop.

Bonus reading

Apparently, laziness is one of the three chief virtues of a computer programmer. The other two are impatience and hubris. Intrigued? Read [The Virtues of a Programmer](#). I think the three virtues can be applied to musicians as well, though it may not be immediately apparent how...

Would you like to work smarter, faster, and better at work, school, and in other areas of your life? Lifehacker is a popular destination for slackers who enjoy “hacking” life. Want to know the fastest way to [dissolve cocoa in milk](#)? How to [fold a shirt in 2 seconds](#)? Quickly [get the hot air out of your car](#) in the summertime? [Swat flies](#) more effectively? Prevent [poop splash](#)? Keep your [email inbox empty](#)? Check out the [Lifehacker blog](#) and [Lifehacker online book](#).

UPDATE: It appears most of the videos have been taken down. Here are some alternatives.

- Dissolve cocoa. (Can't find this video, but the idea is to stir not in the circular motion we're accustomed to, but in straight lines, i.e. side to side or front to back.)
- [Fold t-shirt](#).
- [Cool your car quickly](#) (yes, it's in Japanese with Chinese subtitles, but it's more or less apparent what they're saying).

Resources

Have trouble maintaining a to-do list? Here's the simplest (and visually attractive) to-do web app ever (perfect for lazy folks and procrastinators). So simple and easy that you'll actually use it and get things done. And it's free.

[Do it Tomorrow](#)

The one-sentence summary

“I'm lazy. But it's the lazy people who invented the wheel and the bicycle because they didn't like walking or carrying things.” ~[Lech Walesa](#) (former president of Poland and recipient of the 1983 Nobel Peace Prize)

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