

The 2 Days Rule - Exercise, Productivity, Creativity and Your Brain - IO



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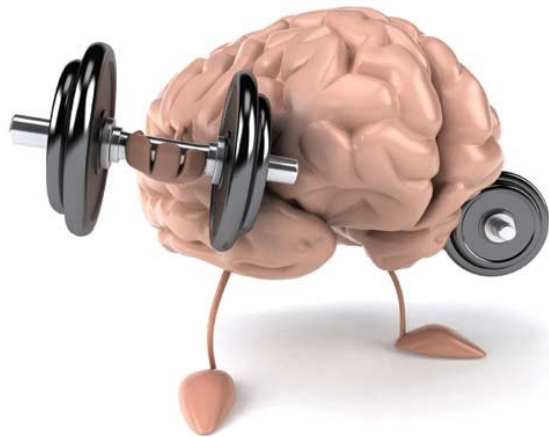
The 2 Days Rule – Exercise, Productivity, Creativity and Your Brain

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One of my favorite books is called **"Brain Rules"**, by Dr. John Medina. He has **12 rules about the brain** that all ring true for me, but for the sake of this blog post I'll stick with Brain Rule #1: **Exercise boosts brain power!**

Exercising is a good thing. I don't know anyone who will argue against that statement. And I will go out on a limb and say that most people would agree. But what exactly are most people agreeing to? What words come to mind when you think about exercising? I'd guess that most would think of things like "being healthy", "losing weight", "training", and "sports". Some of you might even be a little more negative with words like "sore", "painful", "hard work" and others.



Would you think of words like "creativity", "smart", "learning", "relaxing", or dare I say "FUN"? There is a growing body of research proving that exercising is not only good for your body, but even better for your brain. I won't bore you with research here. A quick Google search will keep you busy for days if you are interested. Okay wait... I'll share one of my favorites with you. The following is from a 2011 Fast Company article titled **"The Creative Brain on Exercise"**:

"For artists, entrepreneurs, and any other driven creators, exercise is a powerful tool in the quest to help transform the persistent uncertainty, fear, and anxiety that accompanies the quest to create from a source of suffering into something less toxic, then potentially even into fuel."

I stumbled upon exercise as a productivity tool a long time ago through trial and error. I discovered that I could function on less sleep while being more alert when I was exercising consistently. Ideas also came more easily while exercising, and overall I just felt better...happier. But it's not something that comes easy to me.

I run. I'm a slow runner, but I run. I have allergy and exercise induced asthma ...go figure. I don't drink enough water and often end up dehydrated with a bad headache. Body parts end up hurting more after the run than they did before it. And yet, I continue to run. I should hate running, but I don't. I LOVE it!

I don't run to get better at running.

I never smoked, so I'm not running to quit.

I'm not training for a big marathon. (I actually didn't train at all for my last marathon. Ouch! It was a bad idea.)

I'm not worried about losing weight. (Okay that's a lie. I hate buying new pants a size bigger than the last pair.)

I run because it seems to kick my brain, and my productivity, into overdrive. I can get more work done in shorter periods of time. I feel more creative and log more entries into my "ideas for later" journal. As a **knowledge worker** participating in the age of creativity (read: **A Whole New Mind**), I now consider my runs as work.

Running also just makes me happier despite whatever frustrations life puts in front of me. This is never more apparent to me than when I'm NOT running.

The little things, that I'm not supposed to sweat, feel heavier and heavier the longer I go without a run. So, I've devised a solution that works for me. It may work for you too.

The rule for me is: **No more than 2 days without a run**. When you have a full life filled with a job, a family, and other activities, it's hard to find time to make exercise a priority. So I've started a method of prioritizing running that works for me. On a day that I've run, running drops down on the priority list of to-dos. The next day it moves up in the ranking of priorities and if other priorities have been met then I run that day too. I will only allow myself 2 days without a run. On the third day running becomes THE #1 priority. It may not happen right away that day, but I make sure it happens before the day is over.

And the 2 Day Rule works for more than just exercising. At IO (where change happens fast), if any of my projects sit untouched for more than 2 days they are probably dead.

If you want to survive the marathon of a career instead of just barely surviving the project sprints, then you must exercise. If you want to kick start your creativity and sharpen your mental skills, then you must exercise. Your brain needs the benefits of exercise as much as, if not more than, the rest of your body. Just do it! (geesh, did I just say that?)

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Tags: 2 Days Rule, brain rules, Brent Schlenker, exercise, knowledge worker, productivity

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