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Find Your Rhythm

Increase Your Consistency

Ten years ago my wife and I traveled to a dairy farm in Amery, Wisconsin, to look at a litter of Chesapeake Bay retrievers. These are not cuddly house pets; Chessies are large, hearty dogs bred to withstand the icy waters of northern climates. When you read about Chesapeakes, you read things like, "Can swim for hours in frigid water; are die-hard retrievers; have a mind of their own; trainable, but a little slow to learn; will make you prove that you're the boss; are more aggressive and willful than other retrievers; are not recommended as house dogs; have an oily coat that sheds; tend to drool." My wife claims I love our Chessie because she's a lot like me: train-able, but a little slow to learn.

When Laurie said that the dog would be a house dog, the farmer said, "But these dogs drool and shed. And they stink." Laurie looked at me and said, "I'm used to that. Plus what's the point of having a dog if you can't have it in the house?" So we brought the dog home, and the rule was that she would be kenneled at night, and when she wasn't outside roaming the backyard, she'd be confined to the wood floors in the kitchen area.

For a year we held firm. But eventually we softened and extended Bear's territory from the kitchen to the living room, but by no means would she ever be let upstairs. I insisted that we had to have an area kept clean from hair, drool, and vomit. "Never will this dog be let upstairs," I said.

A year later the kennel was gone and she was sleeping upstairs right outside our bedroom door. And our daughter had given her free reign of her bedroom, sometimes letting her jump right up on the bed. I thought, "How did this happen?" Then I started getting the sad, droopy eyes from my wife and daughter. But I insisted, "No way. There is no way this dog will ever be allowed in my bedroom."

"But she loves you," they'd say. "Look how she follows and adores you. She's already upstairs. What's the harm?"

I said, "She's an animal and smells like it."

For a full year I held firm, until one night our bedroom door was left ajar. Bear nosed her way in, and she quietly lay down as close as she could to my side of the bed. I reached down to grab her scruff in protest, but instead I gently stroked her head. She let out a sigh of relief, and I lay there thinking, "I've lost all control." That became her spot, and I've never admitted this to my family, but eventually it became a comfort to me to have her there.

These days she sleeps downstairs on our good sofa, violating yet another rule I vowed would never be broken. And it's like clockwork: about 7:00 p.m., she gets up from wherever she's lying on the floor, walks over to the sliding door that opens to our deck, and stands there until one of us opens it. Then she waddles her aging body down the stairs, trots back to the woods where she's been trained to go, comes back, and gives a single bark at the door. When we let her in, she walks over to where we're sitting on the couch and stares at us, willing us to get off the couch so she can climb on and settle in for the night. What do we do? We forfeit the couch and go sit somewhere else. It's embarrassing.

"But over the past ten years, Bear has worked her way so deeply into my soul that I can hardly stand the thought of her leaving us one day. Every morning for the past ten years, she's been the first one to greet me in the morning with a full-body dance. It doesn't matter if the day before she got yelled at or swatted on the rump. My furry friend greets me with a full-body dance every morning circling the kitchen table a few times, bumping into furniture, whacking my legs with her gigantic tail that with one sweep can clear an entire coffee table of magazines. If I'm wearing blue jeans and a sweatshirt, she knows it's my day off, and the dance turns into whimpers and whines that don't stop until I take her out back to play fetch; that's after she licks the bottom of my coffee mug of course. (Bear and I have coffee together, because my wife drinks tea.)

On Sundays when I come downstairs dressed in nice slacks and a button-down shirt, the dance is less dramatic, because Bear knows it's all business. I feed her a quick breakfast and I'm out the door. When I get home six hours later, I change my clothes, eat some food, and head for the couch to take a nap. Bear knows the routine, and she knows that now isn't the time for fun. She quietly walks over, lies down next to me on the floor, lets out a big sigh, and stays still until she hears me stir about forty-five minutes later. She raises her head, stands up, and sticks her big, wet nose in my face. If I don't get up right away, she plants her big paw on my arm and coaxes me off the couch with a series of playful, irresistible growls and yelps. She wants me to take her out back to play fetch. It's as if she's got the Sunday afternoon rhythm programmed

into her brain.

There are many things I love about dogs. They're loyal, teachable, communicative, and happy-pretty much every-thing a cat isn't. But I think a dog's greatest asset is that they embody these qualities every minute of every day. They can't help themselves; it's who they are. You never have to worry about a dog being moody or holding a grudge. Dogs don't go through phases or have meltdowns. And when it comes to forgiveness, nobody does it better-they forgive immediately and completely every time. They provide a consistent level of stability in a world that is consistently unstable and unpredictable. More than once I have lain down beside Bear after a hard day, buried my face in her soft fur, and gotten strength from her strength. When sit to write, she lies quietly at my feet until I get up from my seat. Then she heaves herself up, follows me to the fridge, looks inside with me, and then follows me back to lie under the table until I get up again. If I go visit the bathroom, she pulls herself up, follows me ten paces down the hallway, lies down outside the door, and then follows me back to the living room. Her mood is always the same, her habits are the same, her daily dance is the same, and how she works a pheasant is the same. When Bear's tracking a pheasant, I know exactly what to expect by watching her body language and tail. I understand her rhythm, and she understands mine.

Those who study behavioral science would say that a dog's emotional intelligence (EQ) is off the charts because they are transparent, likeable, loyal, dependable, and emotionally stable, and they're like this all the time. There's no deviation; they are predictably this way. Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves are cofounders of TalentSmart, the world's leading provider of emotional intelligence tests and training. They have found that EQ is the number one predictor of professional and personal success. They've learned that while a person's IQ is important, "people with the highest levels of intelligence (IQ) outperform those with average IQs just 20 percent of the time, while people with average IQs outperform those with high IQs 70 percent of the time." That gives me hope. It means that intelligence can take you only so far. People who are highly intelligent but who can't manage their emotions, have unpredictable mood swings, and lack loyalty don't fair well in life. Again, a dog's greatest asset is that they're the same every minute of every day, and there's no deviation; you know exactly what you're getting and when you're getting it. Dogs embody predictable rhythms and routines that make them one of the most dependable creatures on the planet.

Becoming more consistent in life increases a person's over-all effectiveness. And the way you become more consistent is by establishing a healthy rhythm that fits who you are and enables you to meet life's challenges. The good news is that everybody has a rhythm; the bad news is that not everyone's rhythm is healthy or productive. Some people need to change their rhythm to increase their productivity, lower their stress,

and enrich their relationships. If successful, they just might be able to move from the kennel to the kitchen to the master bedroom.

Rhythm Is Not Random

Some people chafe at the notion of establishing predictable rhythms and routines because they say they're confining and squelch creativity. Such people value random, not rhythm. So they make random plans, have random jobs, keep random hours, eat random food, pursue random relationships, and get into random marriages. Random is king because it's spontaneous and free. The problem is that random is often unreliable and undependable. You can't hire random because you never know what will show up or when it will show up. You can't put random on a team because they're off doing their own thing. Random is hard to pin down because random rarely stays put. Random bounces around and goes with the flow, which is nice if you're sixteen, living at home, and driving your parents' car.

A close cousin to random is organic.

Recently, I asked one of our musicians what he was trying to accomplish on the platform because I thought that whatever he was doing was missing the mark. He said, "Well, it's kind of organic."

I said, "What does organic mean?"

He said, "I can't really tell you; as soon as you define it, it's no longer legit." Then he said something about creating a certain "vibe" that leader types don't get. "It's kind of vibey," he said.

Don't get me wrong. I'm okay with random, organic, and vibey as long as you show up on time and deliver the goods. Too often, though, random leads to an ill-prepared, mismanaged, never-enough money, always-running-on-fumes kind of life.

Rhythm, on the other hand, is predictable, dependable, punctual, and hireable. Rhythm keeps office hours. You can locate rhythm. You can count on rhythm. Rhythm gets things done.

Rhythm achieves; random falls short. Rhythm reaches its goals; random doesn't even know what a goal is.

For his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins studied the qualities that separated good companies from great companies. He says, "In the great companies we were struck by the continual use of words like, *consistent, focused, disciplined, rigorous, dogged,*

determined, diligent, precise, fastidious, systematic, methodical, workmanlike, demanding, accountable, and responsible. These words peppered articles, interviews, and source materials on the good-to-great companies, and were strikingly absent from mediocre ones."²

Incidentally, *random, organic, and vibey* didn't make the list.

Some people say that adherence to predictable rhythms, routines, and structures stifles creativity. Untrue. You can be creative within structure, and a consistent structure actually enhances creativity.

Establishing Your Own Rhythm

The most perfect model of humanity to ever walk the planet, Jesus, adhered to a predictable rhythm. Matthew 14:23 re-cords, "After he had dismissed them [the crowd], he went up into the hills by himself to pray." In Mark 1:35, the author writes, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

Part of Jesus's predictable rhythm was that after he spent time and energy being with people, he went away by him-self to rest and pray. He would just disappear, and it actually became an annoyance to his disciples. "Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'" (Mark 1:36-37). Translation: "Why do you keep sneaking away like this? We have places to go, people to heal, important things to accomplish."

There will always be those who don't understand your rhythm and will try to get you to change it to fit their agenda. And if you don't change, they may even question your commitment or work ethic. But they are not you, and they don't have to manage your life; only you can manage your life. If you allow someone else to dictate your rhythm, your pace will become unsustainable, and you won't be able to accomplish your goals.

Allowing someone else to dictate your rhythm is actually an indication that you haven't thought through your priorities. If you set your priorities, then you will follow a predictable rhythm that enables you to accomplish them. You have limitations of time and energy, so you have to make sure that your daily rhythms and routines serve your goals and priorities. Jesus didn't heal, save, or teach everybody Luke 5:15-16 says, "Crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." In other words, Jesus routinely left things

undone and needs unmet. He often withdrew to lonely places while the crowds were still pining to see him. Even Jesus was subject to the limits of time and energy, which is why he established a rhythm.

Paul said, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me... put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:9). What are the predictable practices that could bring more peace and well-being to your work environment? What are the predictable rhythms that could bring more peace to your relationships? What are the predictable practices or rhythms that could bring a more consistent and healthy balance to your studies, diet, exercise, and sleep? People who eat right, exercise, and stay out of debt don't have more willpower than others; they just have better rhythms that they have practiced for so long that they've become normalized behavior-part of their daily routines.

So once you've identified your top goals (I have five top goals), you have to figure out the most effective way to accomplish them. And that will require establishing a predictable rhythm in six main areas.

Your Soul

One of my goals is to have a vital relationship with God. But that doesn't just happen; I have to find a place where I routinely meet God. And I have to meet God in this same place often enough so that it becomes a normal rhythm in my daily life. When it becomes part of my rhythm, I no longer have to fight it or think about it because it is a normal part of my daily life.

But I need a specific place. For me it's at my desk at work. The first thing every morning I read a chapter out of a soul-inspiring book and a chapter or two out of God's Word, and then I spend a few minutes in quiet reflection and prayer. It's during those moments that I get nuggets of wisdom and comfort from great authors and from God's Word that set the tone for my whole day. This morning I read in Proverbs 19:8, "He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers." Those who wish to prosper in their work, studies, relationships, and finances will seek the best wisdom in the world. My books, Bible, and God are waiting for me in the same place every morning. We have a daily appointment.

One of the tools that has helped me and thousands of people in our church is a Bible-reading plan that keeps you on a schedule and helps you establish a rhythm. But we have found that reading plans that try to get you through the Bible in one year are too rigid and defeating. If you miss a day, you scramble to catch up; miss two or three days and you give up entirely because you're so far behind.

The goal in reading your Bible is not to get through it in a year. It's to sit with God for a few minutes several times a week and soak in his wisdom. If you miss a day or two or three, God still loves you the same. *It's not a race; it's a relationship.* Sometimes I'll sit with one paragraph or even just one verse because God is using it to speak to me. (People who are just getting started can access several modified Bible-reading plans on our website: eaglebrookchurch.com.) I've noticed that when I'm on vacation or it's my day off, I seldom spend time like this with God. The reason is because I don't have a set time and place; vacation takes me out of my rhythm. To nourish your soul, you have to get into a predictable rhythm.

Your Body

You need a rhythm to stay physically fit. I belong to a health club partly because having a specific place to go keeps me in a rhythm. The physical act of taking a right turn onto the freeway after work and walking into the health club seals the deal for me as much as I hate it. If I go home, I never exercise. Home triggers a different flow for me. Home is not where I work or work out; home is where I relax, eat meals, and watch TV with my wife and dog. I take the right turn onto the freeway four or five times a week after work. But different for everyone. Many people exercise in the morning and do it at home.

Jim Citrin at Yahoo! surveyed twenty CEOs and asked them about their daily rhythms. Eighty percent of them wake up at 5:30 a.m. or earlier. More than 70 percent of these CEOs exercise in the morning, while 15 percent find a way to do it during the day. Only two of the executives admitted to not exercising on a regular basis.³

The place or environment where you exercise is very important. Hitting the treadmill at 5:30 a.m. in a cold, dark basement without music, TV, or a fireplace is like a prison sentence and not conducive to establishing a long-term rhythm. One of my colleagues works out in her basement at home, but she created a room that's warm, welcoming, and vibrant. She painted the walls a bright color and has a thirty-two-inch plasma TV and a CD player, because that's the only way she can endure the monotony of a thirty-minute workout. But that's her place, six days a week.

In the summer, I alternate between health club workouts and biking. I ride the same twenty-mile loop every time because I'm familiar with every bend, rut, hole, and blind curve in the road. The one time I deviated from my route I almost got killed. I came to a stop sign at an overpass, and I thought it was a four-way stop. As I peddled onto the bridge to go left, a speeding car came over the rise. I braced myself for impact and looked away because there was no way the car could miss me. But it did miss me. I don't know how or why, but I believe God intervened in that moment. I almost lost

my life that day simply because I broke my rhythm and wasn't familiar with the route.

Your body needs exercise to function at optimal levels, but willpower isn't enough. You have to establish a rhythm that becomes as routine as eating and sleeping.

Your Work

When it comes to work, I'm an office guy. It's not that I can't work at home or in a coffee shop, but the physical act of going to my office triggers the work mode in me. When I'm at work, I work; I don't waste time, mess around, or fritter away half the morning surfing the web or chatting in the hallways. I do those things over lunch or at the end of the day, I am most efficient in that environment partly because all my support systems are there: my assistant, colleagues, books, papers, and internet. Once I leave the office, I'm done. I leave the place where I work, which allows me to detach from it, relax at home, and attack my work afresh the next day. If I regularly take work home, my energy wanes, my passion leaks, and my creativity drops. I end up getting the blahs, which is a signal that my rhythm is out of whack. A good rhythm allows your mind, body, and soul a chance to replenish themselves for maximum efficiency.

Bestselling novelist Stephen King writes about his work rhythm: "There are certain things I do if I sit down to write. I have a glass of water or a cup of tea. There's a certain time I sit down, from 8:00 to 8:30, somewhere within that half hour every morning. I have my vitamin pill and my music, sit in the same seat, and the papers are all arranged in the same places. The cumulative purpose of doing these things the same way every day seems to be a way of saying to the mind, you're going to be dreaming soon."⁴

When John Grisham first began writing, he had a certain routine: "I had these little rituals that were silly and brutal, but very important. The alarm would go off at 5, and I'd jump in the shower. My office was 5 minutes away. And I had to be at my desk, at my office, with the first cup of coffee, a legal pad and write the first word at 5:30, five days a week." His goal was to write one page every day. Sometimes that would take ten minutes, sometimes an hour or two. Then he'd begin his full-time job as a lawyer, which he no longer does. At one Page a day he'd have a 365-page novel by the end of the year.

In his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis writes,

I would choose always to breakfast at exactly eight and to be at my desk by nine, there to read or write till one. If a cup of good tea or coffee could be brought me about eleven, so much the better. At one precisely, lunch should be on the table; and by two at

the latest I would be on the road (walk. ing). The return from the walk, and the arrival of tea, should be exactly coincident, and not later than a quarter past four. Tea should be taken in solitude. At five a man should be at work again, and at it till seven. Then, at the evening meal and after, comes the time for talk, or failing that, for lighter reading; and unless you are making a night of it with your cronies there is no reason why you should ever be in bed later than eleven.

One of my friends does his best writing in a coffee shop away from his office, phone, and staff. He does most of it in one day. He's virtually a mole during that entire day-out of sight and mind. I write in stages over several days because in between stages (even at night) creative ideas pop into my subconscious thinking. Some of my best creativity happens when, after I've written awhile, I take a walk, ride a bike, or swim. My mind is seeded with thoughts, but then my sub-conscious is freed up, the oxygen begins to flow, and ideas come flying out of nowhere. This is known as oscillation. You get up from your desk, walk around, climb a flight of stairs, come back, work for a while, get up, and oscillate again. It increases the oxygen and blood flow and refreshes your mind. Some of my best material floats into mind while I'm on my bike or on a walk. What are your work rhythms, and are they working?

Your Team

Now, none of this means you can establish your work rhythm in a vacuum. Very few of us have the liberty of establishing our rhythms exactly the way we want to. When you are a part of a business, school, or corporation and you're receiving a paycheck every two weeks, you can't live by your own rhythm and expect everyone else to work around it. Nobody has the freedom to establish their own rhythm to the neglect of others who work with and around them. Everyone has to attend impromptu meetings, help with unexpected projects, stay late sometimes, or miss a workout. That's life.

I once had an upper-level staff person waltz into work at 10:00 a.m., read the paper in his office until 10:30, do some work, meet someone for a lengthy lunch, stroll back in, check his emails, attend a meeting or two, and leave at 3:00. He said that he liked to work from home, which is fine if his work showed it, but it was lacking on many fronts. He didn't understand our need for him to have regular office hours, model it to those reporting to him, and be a part of the team. He's no longer on our team.

A good team outperforms a group of individuals every time. A team has more ideas, a diversity of skills, and far more synergy than any single person. You can't beat a good team. But building a cohesive team takes time, which is why longevity is so critical to a business, family, or friendship. We've lived in the same town and same house for nineteen years, and the stability that has brought to our children, marriage,

neighborhood, friendships, and church is immeasurable. I heard some advice long ago that helped me: plant a tree in your yard and don't move; watch it grow for at least ten years. I planted more than forty trees on our property, and I've watched them grow for nineteen years. It's one of the best things I ever did.

When you plant your roots, you begin to build a network of team support. For example, I get my tires from Harvey, my car fixed by Vince, my hair done by Becky, my teeth done by George, my medical needs checked by Dale, my money managed by Greg, and my Sichuan chicken prepared by Chuck, I don't have to waste time flipping through the Yellow Pages or wondering if I'm going to get ripped off. They know me, and know them. We're a part of each other's life and rhythm. My wife has told me that if I die before she does, she would never remarry because it would take her too long to train another husband. It's that "trainable, but slow to learn" thing. The thought of it makes her weak.

I feel the same way about our staff. They know my rhythms so well, and I know their rhythms so well, that the thought of starting over with different people is exhausting. None of us is perfect, and all of us have annoying quirks, but we know each other's quirks and have learned to work with them. We can read each other's nonverbal cues and know the triggers that tend to spark conflict. When one of us hurts another unintentionally, we can discern it quicker and patch it up. When you don't know someone well, little hurts can fester, pile up, and morph into resentment and anger.

When you work with a team of people long enough, they begin to establish their rhythms around your rhythms, and that creates efficiency. When people know your rhythms, they know where to find you and how to plan their day around you. If your rhythm is sporadic, nobody can plan meetings with you, count on you, or involve you in their decision making. Collaboration becomes hit and miss, stop and start, and nothing gets done.

Your Marriage

Rhythm makes for healthy marriages because you know when to move in and when to back off, when to give the person space and when to tackle hard issues. If you don't know or respect the other person's rhythm, you or your spouse can become offended, and neither of you gets what you need or want. But when you understand and respect each other's rhythms, there is flow and predictability.

Laurie and I used to get upset with each other on Sunday afternoons because we didn't understand each other's rhythm. I came home from church at 12:30p.m. needing a warm meal, a nap, and a workout; that's all I wanted or needed. She, on the other

hand, wanted to know everything about the morning, how it had gone and whom I had seen; she needed someone to talk to. Our rhythms were out of sync. But instead of talking about each other's rhythm, we just assumed the other could figure it out. "It's obvious what I need, and how can you not know that?"

Finally, we had an inspiring conversation about it, and ever since that day, Sunday afternoons have become the sweet-est part of our week. We've learned that if Laurie gives me time to replenish with a warm meal, a nap, and a workout, then I've got the energy to meet her needs for conversation and time together. It took us about fifteen years to figure that out.

Your Children

Consistency and rhythm are things children need for them to feel secure in the world. One cold fall morning I stopped to pick up my brother-in-law Oz to go hunting, and his two little boys were out at the bus stop with about five other kids. Their backpacks were all lined up in a row. You know the drill. The first one at the stop plops his backpack down first in line to hold his spot, and you move someone's backpack at the risk of getting beaten up. Children know intuitively that it's a mortal sin to move someone's backpack.

So just to mess with them a little, I went over and said, "Whose backpack is first in line?"

"That's Bart's," they all responded in unison. "Bart's is always first," they said.

"How come Bart's is always first?"

Little Oz said, "Cuz Bart's dad leaves for work early, and he puts Bart's backpack out here at like 5:30 in the morning.

I asked, "Well, where's Bart right now?"

"Oh, he never comes out until the bus comes," they said.

I thought, "Well that isn't fair. Bart's in there sipping hot chocolate and watching cartoons while the rest of the kids are out here freezing." So I said, "What do you say we put Bart's bag at the very end of the line?" Their jaws dropped, and nobody said a word; all their little faces had a look of *Is that even legal?*

Finally, little Oz said, "You can't do that, Uncle Bob."

I asked him, "Why not?"

His voice quivered as he said, "Because Bart will cry"

Understand that nobody liked that Bart was always first in line, but what they liked even less was changing the rules. Consistency is very important at the bus stop.

And if moving a backpack at a bus stop is a big deal to kids, think of what moving from school to school, church to church, or home to home does. As much as kids rail against bedtimes, curfews, and rules, research shows that children who have consistent boundaries and limits do much better in school, stay out of trouble more, and have better relationships than children who don't. Given all the challenges, pressures, and fears children are faced with in society today, I caution parents to think carefully about uprooting their kids from the stability of their home, church, and friends.

In his book *Family First*, Dr. Phil states, "One of the major themes you'll hear me repeat throughout this book is that the phenomenal family has a certain rhythm—a beat that communicates, 'This is where we're from, this is what we stand for, and this is what we do together.' Children need this rhythm in their lives, and it's unsettling to them when they don't have it. This factor is absolutely critical to the well being of your family." These rhythms can include a family game night, mealtimes, birthday celebrations, storytelling, bedtime prayers, and going to church together. Dr. Phil states that it's these predictable activities and patterns in your family life that serve as psychological and behavioral anchors for your values and beliefs and that provide your children with a sense of stability and security. Establishing a predictable rhythm is a major factor in helping children gain the confidence they need to navigate a tough world.

Seasonal Rhythm

Do rhythms change depending on the season of life? Yes, but certain rhythms will never change based on a person's hardwiring. I will always be most creative in the mornings. I will never gain energy from social outings. I will always need regular periods of solitude built into my rhythm to restore. I will never allow myself to be ill-prepared when giving a message, speech, or interview. I will always need space after a weekend of leading and speaking. Exercise will always be a part of my rhythm, even on vacation.

God made you in such a way that you need a daily rhythm, weekly rhythm, monthly rhythm, and annual rhythm. At 9:30 every morning I get my only cup of coffee. I reward myself with that small pleasure every day. During lunch I sit in our cafeteria and enjoy the playful banter with staff from all departments. Then at the end of the day, after my workout, I go home to eat, relax, unwind, and read or watch TV with my wife. I love those two and half hours from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. It's my daily Sabbath.

Every Friday is my weekly Sabbath. I don't go to work, talk to staff, answer my phone, or overload my day with projects. Obviously, some home projects need to get done, but a lot of things get left undone. It's why we'll never own a second property. Life's too short.

My monthly rhythm is somewhat dictated by seasonal events like Easter, Christmas, and fall. But I've gotten into a then have one or two weekends off from speaking. I go hard monthly groove where I speak three weekends in a row and then let up, go hard and then let up.

For my annual rhythm, I have a monthly planner that I use to block off vacation and travel time a full year in advance. If it doesn't get on the calendar, it doesn't happen. This also helps my staff members plan their year. After a long, hard season, I reward myself and my family with a getaway of some sort. Living in Minnesota, we've found that going south somewhere for ten days in February helps us thaw out and rejuvenate our souls. When my kids were teenagers, I made a commitment to take them each somewhere fun once a year to make sure I was connecting with their lives. I have a six-week summer break that I use for vacation, writing, and fishing in Alaska, and I always take a fall hunting trip. These are the things that keep me alive. People who are going at Mach speed and fail to build in regular intervals of rest and recovery are out of rhythm and won't sustain over the long haul. Your life should look less like a straight line and more like a roller coaster with regular peaks of output followed by valleys of rest. You don't have a work life and a home life. You have one life, and everything's intertwined.

Breaking the Rhythm

Should rhythms ever be broken? Yes, but only when it's worth it. Vacation is worth it; kids' functions are worth it; birthday parties, milestone celebrations, and pets that wreak havoc with rhythms are worth it. I've learned that I have to make time for things that I don't have time for because that's where God often shows up, that's where surprises and adventures happen. You can't be so rhythmic and calculated that you miss the rich moments that occur outside the daily routine. So there's a place for random, as long as random isn't a lifestyle.

One of the reasons people have such a hard time return-ing from vacation is that they've been out of their rhythm. We've said to our kids many times, "You'll feel better once you get back into a ally takes me a day rhythm." After I've been away, it usu-or two to get back into my rhythm at work, and once I'm in it, my efficiency goes up, I find my groove, and I'm on my way. But those first couple days back are always hard.

One of the ways to ease the pain of reentry is to main-tain your exercise, sleep, and diet rhythms while on vaca-tion. Rhythms need to become a part of your lifestyle even on vacation. I haven't seen a New Year's Eve midnight for decades. Why? Because watching the ball drop isn't worth yanking me out of my sleep rhythm.

The Payoff of Rhythm

At this point you might be saying, "What a regimented, boring life Bob must lead; that's not for me." Well, it all depends on what you want out of life. Finding a healthy rhythm helps you say no to things that don't coincide with your goals. And it gets you in a groove that increases your efficiency. This creates space or margin in your life because you're on track and not constantly pulled in several directions. So you're able to find time to spend with your spouse or family on a daily basis. You have a legitimate day off because you're not working sixty-hour weeks. You're physically and financially fit, and you're on a purposeful path that makes you feel good about yourself and others. In short, you're not living on fumes due to a random, disorderly life. The payoff to rhythm is huge.

Every person I've ever met who's accomplished something great in life applied the discipline of rhythm for one simple reason: they had to. Every great musician, writer, student, speaker, leader, athlete, builder, teacher, and doctor is well acquainted with this discipline. Ask any successful person if the countless hours of studying, rehearsing, and practicing were easy, and they'll tell you they were brutally hard. But they'll also tell you those hours paved the way to a great life.

Many years ago the legendary golf pro Gary Player was hitting balls off the practice tee one morning, and the first ball he hit went 280 yards straight as a bullet. A guy in the gallery just within earshot said, "Man, I'd give anything to be able to hit a golf ball like you."

Gary walked over to the guy and said, "No, you wouldn't." The guy said, "Yes, I would. I'd give anything to hit like that."

Gary said, "No, you wouldn't. You wouldn't be willing to do what it takes. You have to rise early in the morning and hit five hundred balls until your hands bleed. Then you stop, tape your hands, and hit five hundred more balls. The next morning you're out there again with hands so raw you can barely hold your club, but you do it all over again. If you do that through enough years of pain, then you can hit a ball like that."⁹

Player won more than 160 professional golf tournaments and is a member of "the big three"-along with Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer-who dominated golf through the 1960s and 1970s.

Ninety-nine percent of life is dull and routine, but that 99 percent of dull and routine eventually shows up in the 1 percent that everyone sees. It's what made Gary Player, and those like him, go from good to great.

Bottom line, rhythm increases your efficiency and effectiveness, which means you're able to accomplish things at work or school that you couldn't otherwise. That leads to more opportunities, more success, and more relational and financial stability. People begin to value and trust you, and they give you greater freedoms and privileges. You can take guilt-free vacations and know that your house is in order back home. Rhythm might seem difficult at first, but it gets you where you want to go.