

# Even in the quietest moments

by Robert M. Gignac

My apologies to the musical group Supertramp for borrowing the title of perhaps their best album, but there is certainly something to be said for quiet moments of reflection. Unfortunately for far too many of us, there is zero time for quiet reflection between a ringing cell phone,

Blackberry, it took us almost 10 minutes to find a compatible date for lunch, and we only ended up with that date once we went five weeks into the future. All this to plan a friendly lunch?

Appointments. Clocks. Projects. Deadlines. Schedules. To do lists. Personal obligations. These are just a few of the symbols of “the cult” that we have fallen prey to in our modern society. We have become hard-driven individuals so intent on achieving personal value from our work that we seem to have very little time left for our families, friends, or heaven forbid—ourselves.

My point is this: while we are struggling with the lists, schedules, and projects, we are also trying to juggle serious decisions about our businesses and careers. Decisions that need to be carefully thought out, with some form of analysis done, and then finally reflected upon before the decision actually is made.

In the absence of “quiet moments”, too many of our decisions are arrived at in a reactionary, almost “crisis mode” mentality. The problem is that when we make decisions in this manner, we end up making what we think is the right choice for the moment, but we often don’t anticipate the future consequences that come from that quickly made, inadequately thought out conclusion. Those consequences sometimes come back to haunt us—always at a point after we have long forgotten about the snap decision we made under pressure when we didn’t have time to think.

There is an old Will Rogers quote that I like: “If you find yourself in a hole the first thing to do is stop digging”. In some ways, it seems we have lost the ability to value thought over action. Instead, we value “doing” over “thinking”. Action is important, it moves us forward and accomplishes things, but it is thought that ensures that the correct action is initiated in the first place.

I polled some friends recently with this question, “When was the last time you

took the opportunity to sit quietly with a cup of coffee and actually do nothing but think?” Once they stopped laughing, it hit me. Perhaps we are losing the ability to be introspective. Instead of thinking, we define ourselves by how “busy” we are. In fact, I recently read an article in which an employee stated: “When I do actually take the time to purely think, I sit with my fingers poised on the keyboard so nobody knows I’m just thinking.”

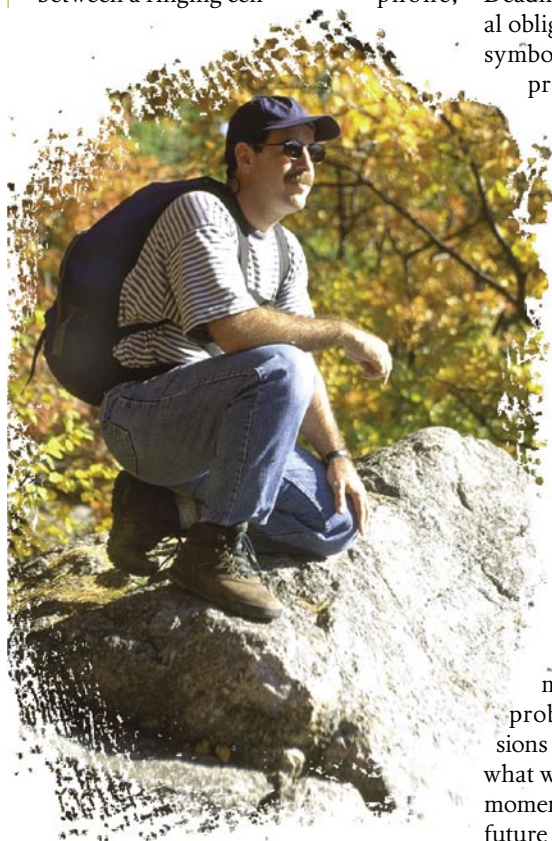
Just thinking? What an fascinating concept. How did we get to the point where “thinking” is akin to “daydreaming”? If we are not actively engaged in action, is it the equivalent of doing nothing? I hope not. How many of your best ideas arrived courtesy of quiet, unstructured time—a walk in the woods, sitting by a lake, puttering in the garden. Time not filled with the distractions of pagers, cell phones, and “you have mail!” sound bites.

As we get back into the swing of work—hopefully after taking some needed downtime over the summer—it would do us all some good to simply spend a little more time without the added stimulation of our technology reminding us how “busy” we are. Ditch the pagers, Blackberries, and cell phones; turn off the computer. I am not suggesting for a whole day, start with something simple, maybe 30 minutes. Grab a pad of paper and a pencil for doodling and spend some quality time “thinking” instead of simply “doing”. I suspect you’ll be better for it. SBCM

*Robert Gignac is the owner of Taynac & Associates (currently on a two-year assignment in Switzerland), providing keynote presentations, seminars and workshops on personal development, motivation, and leadership. He is also the co-author of the Canadian best seller “Rich is a State of Mind” now in its second printing. Reviews and a sample chapter are available at [www.richisastateofmind.com](http://www.richisastateofmind.com). To book Robert to speak at your next event, please contact him at [rgignac@taynac.com](mailto:rgignac@taynac.com) or check their Web site.*



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the vibration of our wireless Blackberry, and an in-box filled with 78 new messages that we just haven’t had time to deal with. Oh, and I also forgot about the pile of “snail mail”, and a computer monitor covered in yellow sticky notes.

In the past several years, there have been many studies into what some people are calling the “cult of busyness”. We live in a world that worships busyness. Everywhere you go people talk about how busy they are. Not only that, they’re busy and they’re stressed. The two seem to go hand in hand.

I experienced this personally last week when I tried to schedule lunch with a friend. Between my PalmPilot and her