



*Don't you dare, said the voice in my head.  
GET BACK TO WORK!*

There's this voice in my head that often nags me ... "get to work". I've been hearing it for years. I used to think that it was either a rather unique affliction – or perhaps just something that goes along with a "good work ethic". If this strikes a chord, you and I could be – should be? - multitasking a half dozen things right now. Although I do love what I do –

... at times there's just too much of it! And the technology that seemed to have such promise to carve some moments free has instead become more annoying attachments that keep me plugged in. Some recent reading makes it clear that I'm not alone in struggling to find balance between work and the "rest of life".

Forty five years ago, social scientists actually worried that with new technologies, people would end up with so much leisure time on their hands it would lead to all kinds of mischief. First, I think they had a misguided notion that a little mischief was something to be avoided, and secondly, technology as a source of time freedom has for me at least turned out to be about as relevant as the "paperless office". **Collectively we're working more today than humans have ever worked before** – and we Americans are at the head of the rat race, working some 9 hours more a week than our European competitors.



While in Chicago's field museum last summer, I was struck by an exhibit on native American subsistence cultures – who I found out spent about FOUR hours a day in their primary work of scavenging for food. With an hour here and there for some other basic human functions, in spite of their rough scrabble existence they had something like *twice* the time we have today for such things as looking at the stars and dreaming. With all our work, comes a lot of stress, and surveys show that architects as a group are

among those most stressed. Stress, work, work and more work ... at some point along the way I've started having the notion to stop ... breathe ... and find those places, physically and mentally, that provide some better perspective and balance.



Having failed pretty miserably in my attempts to simply tell that nagging 'back to work' spirit to just shut up now and again, I've decided to use my architect's toolbox of creative problem solving on this increasingly frustrating dilemma. One approach reaping rewards for me has been to reframe the question – 'what is work'. My goal is a definition so broad that it can take in such key initiatives as 'cultivating curiosity', 'nurturing connections', and 'expanding my depth and breadth of spirit, insight and intention'.

While that personal effort is admittedly a 'work in progress' (pun intended), there is for me a relationship with both architecture ... and the AIACV (you *knew* I'd get around to

that sooner or later)! I'd like to think of our venerable association as NOT being another place for more conventional "work" – heaven knows we all have enough of that already – but as a resource for those times, rare as they might be, when you, or I, lift our heads from our desks, bleary eyed perhaps and beat, looking for relief, inspiration, connection and recharging. Perhaps the coming together of a collective search for 'more' is in some ways like developing a collage of tools, snacks and musical instruments. When you are ready to play, looking for a tasty morsel, conversation with a kindred spirit - some 'fun' – I hope you'll consider what's been shaping up over the last few months. It's a collection of opportunities as rich and diverse as our membership.

And frankly, for me the bottom line is that those projects, programs and features that strike a chord – great! - Let's nurture and sustain them! And those that don't – let's let go of them. To make that model work requires the tools, snacks and instruments of our organization to be diverse and adjustable, and in that endeavor, I think we are doing very well indeed.



So in deference to those precious moments that you have taken from your more 'pressing' demands in reading this already, let me here offer some tokens – a few spots where I have found a big return on relatively modest measures of life energy (time) in further diversion.

1 ½ days Sarah Susanka's book "The Not So Big Life" – a guide based on an architect's struggle - and her measure of success – in transcending the linear nature of 'work' to make room for 'what really matters'. Susanka makes use of the perspectives, tools, and principals of architecture to 'remodel a life'. I owe the time for reading this in large part to the abundance of time that was placed unexpectedly in my hands by long delays in returning from last month's DC grass roots. Thanks, United Airlines after all. <http://www.notsobiglife.com/>

18 minutes A presentation that just might spear your consciousness as deeply as it did mine. It's about the battle going on in your own brain, and what would happen if the right side won for a day ... as it could if you suffered a massive stroke and you happened to be a brain scientist able to understand what was going on. How the Mind Works by Jill Bolte Taylor <http://www.ted.com/talks/view/id/229> ...

2 minutes A test (forwarded to me by my architect friend Rick Carlisle) that challenges you to reconsider the skills you *think* you have in paying attention in our multitasking world <http://www.dothetest.co.uk/>

3 seconds A statistic from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as quoted in the Sacramento Bee on Oct 14, 2007: Of all workers surveyed, categorized by occupation, the lowest rates of depression lasting two weeks or longer were suffered by (you guessed it) ... architects ... After all ... after all that work, we get something to look at, admire and reflect in! No wonder most of your clients 'wanted to be an architect'!

In closing, I turn to George Carlin who observed:

“Some people see things that are and ask, Why? Some people dream of things that never were and ask, Why not? *Some people have to go to work and don't have time for all that...*”

Got any of your own pearls to share? Drop me a line [mfm@appliedarts.net](mailto:mfm@appliedarts.net)  
[www.boldone.com/aiacv.html](http://www.boldone.com/aiacv.html)

**The thinking parts are actually pretty peculiar looking ...no?**

