It was time. I absolutely knew it was time. For each checked off item on my "to-do"list, three more were added.

Oh yes, I was getting things done all right. Work stuff, family stuff, all the other stuff. But I was finding it harder and harder to stay focused. There was even a hint of worry that I might show up on the wrong day, at the wrong time for something important. And, I'm feeling tired. Not necessarily in the body sense, but in the if-I-have-to-remember-one-more-thing-my-brain-is-going-to-expplode sense.

We're not talking about "burn-out" here. That term is far too dramatic for the mood I'm experiencing. Let's just say I recognize that there's a serious need for a bit of down time to get me back on track.

And so, I'm planning a long weekend away in the not too distant future.

For me, a get-away can be enjoyed three times: preparation, execution and recollection. All good. Even firming up plans for the great escape is making me feel better.

But what is it exactly that a vacation can do for us? Or, more precisely, what makes a vacation a vacation in the biological sense of the word?

The answer lies in understanding how the brain works and what it needs to function at its best. "Hit the Reset Button in Your Brain" an article from the New York Times by Daniel J. Levitin explained it very well.

Using the analogy of the playground seesaw, Levitin describes the two attentional systems in our brains and how they work together – or should I say – alternately – to let us perform at our best. On the one hand there's the task-positive network (also called the central executive) which turns on when we're focused and engaged in a specific task keeping us on track. On the other, there's the task-negative network (the daydreamer) which wakes up when our mind is wandering.

The daydreamer may look like she's zoned out watching the ocean, or listening to the birds, or cleaning the bathroom, but nothing could be further from the truth. Turns out that "this brain state, marked by the flow of connections among
disparate ideas and thoughts, is responsible for our moments of greatest creativity and insight, when we're able to solve problems that previously seemed unsolvable.”

The switch between the two systems is moderated by another component – the attentional filter which "helps to orient our attention, to tell us what to pay attention to, and what we can safely ignore". All well and good when we need to watch out for sabre tooth tigers, oncoming traffic, or other potential threats. Problem is the relentless flow of information from the internet, television, and other sources never gives the central executive the chance to take a long lunch, let alone time off! A 2011 study found that on most days we take in what amounts to about 174 newspapers worth of information. Facts alone don’t make us great or creative thinkers.

We, and our central executive brains, need a break. Keeping our beautiful brains working at their best, most focused and creative, Levitin offers some helpful tips:

- Accept that solving problems might take a little longer than expected.
- Take breaks after 30-50 minutes of focused work to stretch, stare out the window, or focus on anything other than what you were focused on.
- Don’t multitask!
- Set aside a specific time for checking e-mail (not with every “bing”), and social media.
- Get out in nature
- Listen to music
- And my personal favorite….take naps!

As you can see from the list, you don’t need far away places with strange sounding names, or even go away from home to give your brain the break it needs.....although a physical change of venue can sometimes help the process. Just remember the seesaw and give both riders equal attention.

Peace- Judi England RN, LMT, Kripalu Yoga Instructor – 9/15/2014

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When Life Gives You Lemons (1)
Dolly Magarik: Excellent reminder for many, new information for many as well…

Try a little tenderness (for yourself) (1)
libra6: I read this the other evening and tried to respond but it didn’t happen and I have read this a couple…

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