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A BUSINESS MAN'S HOBBIES

THE play spirit is an essential ingredient of recreation. The more complicated civilization becomes, and the more elaborate the machinery of living is made, the more necessary it will be to create a temporary retreat from the material obligations of everyday life.

The work we do to earn a living is activity toward an end, and play is activity as an end. At the same time, play is not aimless. Play, fun and laughter are agents of health. They give repose to the usually busy brain centres and tone up the muscles.

The Greeks were the first people in the world to play, writes Edith Hamilton in *The Greek Way to Western Civilization*. They played on a great scale. All over Greece there were games, all sorts of games. Triumphant generals gave place there to an Olympic victor. To rejoice in life, to find the world beautiful and delightful to live in, was a mark of the Greek spirit which distinguished it from all that had gone before. It was the Greek philosopher Aristotle who gave us a near approach to a psychoanalytic theory of play. He said that in play the emotions become purified of a great deal of the distasteful and dangerous properties which adhere to them.

If there were nothing else done by play, one thing justifies our indulging in it: play helps us to forget our worries and at the same time tones up our minds for a fresh attack on the cause of our worries.

Variety in play is better than concentration on one form of play. The man whose only sport is golf is not using his play instinct to the greatest advantage. Under certain circumstances a game of golf may not be just the right prescription to promote digestion, soothe the nerves and ward off old age.

To Have a Hobby

To have a hobby is to indulge in some form of play which exercises our hands as well as our brains, and to take a line that cures our despondent, worried, jittery feelings.

The machine age has tended to make our jobs routine. There are so many of us doing single parts of big jobs that we are inclined to feel individually unimportant and insignificant. When we indulge in a hobby through which we see something taking complete form under our own hands, then we gain self-confidence and self-respect.

Every person should spend five or six hours a week at some creative task in which he can submerge himself completely. The sense of pressure under one's everyday task can be escaped by riding a hobby vigorously around the cellar.

The hobby should be something in which a person may excel and in which he takes a keen delight. There is relaxation and comfort in doing something for the sheer delight of doing it. This means, naturally, that one's hobby may change form many times in a lifetime, but even the changes are good, because every one gives us something new to think about, a new approach to the world, a new way of seeing things.

We Need a Rest

Everyone — even the fortunate man who finds his job challenging and exciting — needs rest, a change from accustomed tasks.

The rest may be a few minutes stretched-out relaxation, or a half hour working at or gloating over the results of a hobby, or a walk, or a whirl at some physical training apparatus. It may even consist in doing something that the janitor should do, something that demands stretching, cramping, stooping and hammering that exercises muscles. Hanging a picture on the wall, or moving one to a new location, can be restful in this sense of the word.

The trick is to cease using tired muscles and to use others that are well-rested. If, after an hour of dreary toil over the month's bills or the sad state of affairs on the production line, you take a long walk, you are resting as you walk — resting your eyes and mind while working your legs.

While exercise and changed activity are good as restoratives after work, most people wish to do something specific as a hobby. They desire a sense of achievement.

Well, the field is wide. One may learn to play a musical instrument (a Toronto business executive started last year to take piano lessons); or explore space with a telescope or minute life with a microscope (there are astronomy and chemistry clubs in many cities and towns); or watch birds, or collect insects, or probe rocks, or trace the steps taken by explorers and adventurers. Every part of Canada abounds in opportunities for indulging hobbies that carry with them the reward of health-giving activity and mental stimulation.

Out of achievement in a hobby comes the sense of contribution, of accomplishment. There can be, also, a feeling of companionship — with others who are engaging in similar hobbies, and with one's family, whose members will be inevitably caught up in our enthusiasm.

When you have something definite and attractive to look forward to, the thought of it will give a glow and a more intense vitality to your whole day.

Tests by neurologists show that mental ability increases as the ability to use the hands increases. A hobby that uses manual dexterity demands clear thinking and the working out of solutions to problems, and success in these gives us a sense of pride and pleasure.

But Not Too Much

A hobby should not become obsessive, either of thought or of time. It should be challenging enough to keep one interested, but not so difficult that one can't achieve something in it; it should not demand so much work that it becomes merely another job.

Some questions designed to help us select suitable hobbies are suggested by Dr. William C. Menninger in his booklet called *Enjoying Leisure Time*. If you can answer "yes" to most of them, says Dr. Menninger, you'll know that you are on the right track.

Here are the questions: Will this activity give me fun and enjoyment? Is it within my capabilities? Can I make the time for it? Will it meet my social needs? Can I make the space for it? Can I afford it? Can it be continued indefinitely, even after my retirement?

It should be such a hobby that, instead of dreading our tomorrows we will look forward to them. The choice is as wide as life itself.

It is never too late to start, but on the other hand there are virtues in starting early. One group of older men wanted to get advice about what they should do to occupy their years after retirement. The group found, by questioning others who had developed active and fascinating hobbies, that they had started early in life. It is not wise to arrive at the first morning of retirement with the idea of starting something *then*.

As much time as possible should be devoted to cultivating enduring interests. It may be necessary to try and then discard several hobbies before the right one is found.

Let it be gardening or pottery, collecting or wood-carving, photography, radio-building, machinist's work, carpentry, painting or anything else, something can be found that will give a sense of self-completion, of creation and of tranquillity.

Collecting may seem an inane pursuit to many people, but with a little ingenuity it can be made fascinating and challenging. One stamp collector — stamp collecting has been called "King of Hobbies" — hinges an issue of a country's stamps in a frame around the page, and then in the middle he writes particulars about it: when it was adopted, the artist who designed it, why this design was chosen, and any other interesting matter he can glean from the encyclopedia, the history of the country, and the daily papers.

This is a more thrilling way to go about collecting than the mere scraping together of a lot of something. It is a plan that can be adapted to building collections of autographs, china, guns, coins, buttons, insects or flatirons.

In prospecting for a hobby we should not forget reading, or we should leave enough spare time from other things for this aid to intellectual growth. We don't need to be Quiz Kids, but we should have something to challenge our thinking, the feature about us which distinguishes us from the lower animals. No special scholarship aptitude is necessary. Many persons who started after forty to read translations of the classics found them just as fascinating as they had found thrillers earlier in their lives.

Creative Interest

A hobby satisfies the desire in all of us to create something. There are a thousand and one ways in which people satisfy their creative urge. Take the crafts — woodworking, weaving, leather working, metal working, basketry, clay modelling, ceramics; or the arts — painting, drawing, composing, writing, photographing; or gardening, raising pets, looking after an aquarium; or making airplanes, boats, doll houses. These are just some of the many ways in which you can be a maker, an originator.

In choosing a hobby, the really big question is: Will it give you fun and enjoyment? It must interest you. It must be something you do because you want to do it.

But we must not allow a hobby to become master. We should be able to drop it painlessly at any time when more imperative demands are made of us. It should be willing to put up with our fits-and-starts approach to it. It should not become possessive.

Enjoyment of Life

Leisure time use, whether in a strenuous exercise or in something more sedentary, should be made up of enjoying things that are pleasant. Thus doing, we gain control of our thoughts, and it is our thinking that makes us what we are — executive enterprisers or worrying workers, pleasant companions or grouches. Right thinking tends to give us satisfactory lives and the state of mind that brings peace.

This involves a certain amount of self-control, without which there never has been, and cannot be, a good life. It is necessary to make all our other virtues avail.

Only those who are self-controlled can adapt themselves to the perpetual shifting of conditions we know in our day, and any hobby that contributes to self-control is well worth while. We recall Napoleon, "The wonderful being who could have governed the world, but could not rule his own restless mind."

A hobby can add to enjoyment of life by calming irritations and enabling the hobbyist to turn his nervous feeling into repose. In fact, being calm can be made a hobby in itself. Plutarch's advice may seem quaint to us, but there is a deal of good sense in it: "We should habituate ourselves, when letters are brought to us, not to open them instantly . . . not to bite the strings in two . . . when a messenger comes, not to run to meet him . . . not to jump up when a friend tells us he has something new to tell us."

Seeking Happiness

True repose does not depend upon external conditions, but on sound adjustment to life. It is not to be achieved suddenly, by a miracle, but gradually by planning our days so as to get a balance of activity and leisure, of doing and of thinking. We may not be able to correct the cause of whatever troubles us, but we can perhaps offset the thing itself.

Anyhow, our hobby of self-control will enable us to keep cool in an emergency until it is very clear just what should be done. It will help us to level off our ups-and-downs, so that, while not soaring so high in the fever heat of some enthusiasm, we have not quite so far to drop when we shut off the power.

Out of a balanced life arises the state of mind we call happiness. It has the relation to pleasure that Mark Twain saw between climate and weather: it is the same thing but it lasts longer.

Happiness is not to be waited for, but is something we should step out to seek. It does not consist in the night-club idea of what is a good time. It does require health, self-expression, and a course to steer. These are in some degree inter-dependent and reciprocating. If we have physical health we have an interest in progressing toward self-expression. If we have an urge toward self-expression we have an incentive toward health.

Happiness is a positive thing, but there is room for one negative: if an unhappiness has failed to befall us, we can enjoy that fact as a happiness. As the Irish proverb puts it: "If you can't be happy, be aisy. If you can't be aisy, be as aisy as you can."

About Friendship

Essential to pleasurable leisure time and to effective executive work is friendship, and friendship can become a hobby. Mature men and women have found that friendship, their greatest standby in work and in play, is not something won by hard trying. Youths imagine that the leading events in their lives will make their entrance on the scene to the sound of drums and trumpets, but when we look back we find that all the important things — and especially our friendships — came in quietly, almost unnoticed.

To have a close friend with whom to exchange opinions on current affairs or the philosophy of the ages is a priceless gift for leisure-time spending. By this sharing, happiness is multiplied. It makes life more vivid to have a friend with whom one may turn on one's brain.

Well-rounded Living

The secret of a healthful, well-rounded life, whether for business executive or housewife, is to really make the best of what one has. This does not mean to be acquiescent in one's environment, but to *make* it the best one can.

When you analyse some acquaintance who is always full of enthusiasm that you envy, what do you find? That his enthusiasm is made up of a number of things: knowledge, absorbing interest, optimism, physical well-being, imagination, initiative, and a passion for doing things. These are qualities which can be cultivated in one's leisure time.

Building upon these, the wise man will do what he does in his business and family life: he will preserve a proper proportion between his thought for the present and his thought for the future in order not to spoil the one by paying too great attention to the other. Frivolous people live too much in the present; worriers live too much in the future.

The well-rounded person knows that, having done his best, it is useless to consume energy in fretting. Far better use leisure time in relaxing and building up reserves so as to take up the battle with renewed vigour when the time comes.

This is far from languid contentment. No businessman is ever contented with business as it is: he wishes to make it better. No good housewife is ever so contented with her house-furnishings and her cookery that she ceases to seek improvement. Our human urge is against becoming indistinguishable molecules or assembly line robots.

Some Suggestions

The first order of business toward better use of leisure time is to *do* something. There is great satisfaction to be found in being able to look at and pat

with one's hand something one has created and say: "That's mine. It may not seem much to the rest of you, but I think it's grand. And I did it."

There are a thousand-and-one ways in which people can create things. W. Van Til remarks in his booklet *Time on your Hands*: "There is no denying that many of us have a bad case of the American leisure time disease called spectatoritis. We sit on the bleachers; we sit in our armchairs; we sit in Row K, seat 12." Well, it's no more wrong to sit and listen or to sit and watch than it is to eat ice cream, says Van Til, but don't let us sit on our hands all the time. Put them to use.

Television, radio, the movies, and sporting events can be exciting and fun, but they are at best vicarious pleasures. Someone else is doing the fighting, or indulging in romance, or doing things successfully. We have no part in what we see or hear. Best use of leisure time demands a reasonable assignment of time for participation.

The second suggestion for wise use of leisure time is to get started at once. It is largely a matter of just going ahead: "You can't get a hit with the bat on your shoulder" is a saying from baseball that fits the case. Whatever your knack or attribute and however tiny it is, make it grow.

Anyone who doubts that there is a hobby or a leisure time activity suited to his capabilities and desires should know that there is a book called *Care and Feeding of Hobby Horses* by Ernest Elmo Calkins. It contains 218 lists of books on hobbies — not a list of 218 books, but of 218 *lists* of books.

A third hint is to be careful. Pleasure, even in leisure time, should never be purchased at the expense of pain, nor even at the risk of incurring it. Some sports should not be indulged in without our having a medical checkup; some hobbies may be too much for our eyesight. Every man possesses a limit beyond which he cannot go. Our satisfaction point, and our saturation point, are determined by our own peculiar nature. The Golden Mean of the Greeks was simply a way of life which avoided excesses.

Be Reasonable

The fourth suggestion is to be reasonable about the spending of leisure time. When we attempt things beyond our capacity we invite sorrow. A good approach to the liberal spread of hobby choice is that of Socrates when confronted by hundreds of luxurious articles spread for sale in the market place. He said "How much there is in the world that I do not want."

It would not be sensible, for example, for the person who has no skill of hand and eye to embark upon a clay modelling hobby. It would not gratify the carpenter to do carpentry in the evening, using the same skills and muscles as in his daily work.

It is well, indeed, to project into a hobby some of one's work skills and work lore, fitting the hobby to one's aptitudes. But this is not to be interpreted narrowly. It is no health-giving relief for the executive

to use his spare time in running a business, even if it be in a different line from the one which takes up his working day.

He needs to explore some field of recreational activity with which he is relatively unfamiliar. He doesn't have to be a superior athlete to enjoy playing handball, or accomplished in any art in order to enjoy it as a hobby. After all, most of us are just average; there are only a few champions.

As for taking on executive responsibilities outside his job, it might be a good rule for him to refuse obligations unless he is sure that they are his. Men and women have been known to kill themselves because they added imaginary obligations to their true responsibilities. The essayist Addison quotes an epitaph from an Italian tombstone: "I was well, but trying to be better, I am here."

Achieving Tranquillity

A well-balanced hobby life will include spare time activity designed to provide physical health, intellectual growth, contemplation, social enjoyment, creative effort, audience relaxation, and periods of solitude.

It may be well for a suburban dweller to doff his prim business suit, to completely relax in an old pair of baggy tweeds, and to putter around in the garden. Later in the evening, with slippers and pipe, he will settle before the cosy fire with a favourite book.

The aim and object of it all is to achieve tranquillity. The business man needs space and air in his mind. He wants that sort of serenity which seems to be impossible of attainment in the hurly-burly of everyday business life. It comes in part from active creative hobbies, and in part from quiet, solitary intellectual pursuits. Boredom has no place in leisure.

Good leisure use is not like a blazing fire, which might burn. It is rather, as so well put by Walter B. Pitkin in one of his books, like the dance of firelight upon a wall. It doesn't scorch; it has a playful touch.

Every man, however dynamic he may be in his bread-earning life, may use his spare time to cultivate and to take pleasure in a quiet and cheerful temperament, happy in the enjoyment of a sound body, a clear intellect, and lively interest in things. He needs time by himself in the midst of the whirl, for contemplation or for making things. And he is a wise man who leaves some of his leisure time unaccounted and unplanned for, making no effort except what the caprice of the moment dictates.

That day is ill-spent in which a mature person has not done something constructive along the lines of his interest, or in which he has been too depressed to notice the brightness of the sun, the colour of grass and of flowers, the mystery of the sea and the lure of moonlight on the water.

There is no ready-made hobby suit into which all people will fit. Every person makes his own pattern. By making it wisely, he may cure a present ill, fill a great want, or prevent physical and mental ailments. And, as is said pungently by one of the philosophers: "It is disgraceful for a person to grow old in self-neglect."