

# *The Mini-Retreat Solution*



How to RELAX & REFRESH  
ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

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## *Mini-Retreats*

### AN EASY WAY TO STAY HEALTHY, HAPPY AND CREATIVE

I used to work in a very busy office where people worked 12- to 14-hour days. Nobody took breaks, not even for lunch.

For me, this was a new experience. Before I came to North America I lived in Europe, where my colleagues and I went to lunch at noon every day and returned an hour later. Now my colleagues and I were eating in front of our computer screens, silently responding to e-mails or working on our projects.

One day, as I got up from my chair and made my way to the washroom, I noticed that my greatest ideas occurred during these short pauses in my otherwise frenetic workday.

It dawned on me that short breaks in a busy day are vitally important to our inspiration and creativity. The more I thought about it, the more I realized how much my work performance and creative ability depended on them.

Whenever I felt rested and energized, I could easily focus on my work. New ideas came easily. When I came upon obstacles, I faced them with calm resolve. I had a happy, can-do attitude and worked well with those around me.

But when I pushed through an intense day, denying myself breaks for the sake of getting things done, I felt very different –increasingly frazzled and drained. My tension grew and my patience diminished. Challenges felt more challenging, and so did the people around me.

Once I recognized the connection between short breaks and the quality of my day, I was excited and wanted to make this a regular part of my life. To remind myself to relax and recharge periodically, I posted a sign above my desk:

*“Take more breaks.”*

It seemed like an effortless goal, but I knew it would take time to retrain myself—especially amidst the culture of non-stop action around me. Fortunately, my reminder note worked.

I started experimenting with different ways to quickly renew my energy and focus. *How could I recharge myself on the way to the washroom? How could I recharge during my commute home from work? How could I relax in the evening to get a good night's sleep?* I explored a lot of different ways to relax, from visualizations to deep breathing and movement.

In my mind, I called these relaxation sessions “Mini-Retreats.”

### WHAT IS A MINI-RETREAT?

A Mini-Retreat is simply a short break in your day, a few moments devoted to recharging your internal batteries.

It's whenever you give yourself permission to step out of your full-speed life—the action, pressures, interactions and demands—and shift into neutral for a little while.

It's putting the world on pause while you take your overworked mind on a tour of ideas and images that support the health of your body, mind and soul.

By deliberately stepping out of the familiar, hectic pace of life and redirecting attention within—even if only for a few moments—you quickly recharge your energy and refresh your mind. When you pick up where you left off, you're more creative, more focused and more enthusiastic for the rest of your day.

Research supports the tremendous impact this can have, showing that several short periods of relaxation throughout the day are better for our health than one long relaxation period.

Fortunately, you can relax yourself deeply—several times a day, if you like—without taking any extra time out of your day. You can retreat *anytime, anywhere*—sitting in traffic, working at your desk, even as you fall asleep.

Mini-Retreats are flexible and easy to work into your day, the perfect solution for busy people with stressful lives.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book was written, not only to introduce you to the concept and benefits of Mini-Retreats, but also to help you make them a part of your daily life.

It's not just about how to take a Mini-Retreat ... it's about how to lead a happier, more relaxed and productive life.

The following pages will help you adopt Mini-Retreats as a healthy habit to support your well being, just like brushing your teeth. As with any healthy habit, the majority of the benefits come with regular practice, so it's important to find the Mini-Retreat options that really work with your lifestyle. Fortunately, that won't be hard. With this book as a guide, Mini-Retreats will soon become second nature to you.

The book is divided into three main sections:

**Section I** guides you through six simple steps to make Mini-Retreats really work for you:

### 1. Realize the Benefits of Mini-Retreats

Notice your current relaxation and stress habits. Learn how short periods of relaxation throughout your day can boost your health and performance. Evaluate yourself and discover how you can personally benefit from Mini-Retreats.

### 2. Choose a Mini-Retreat That's Right for You

Whether you are strapped for time, always on the road or stuck in an office, there are Mini-Retreats that will work for you—right where you are. This book offers you over 80 choices!

### 3. Overcome Barriers to Taking Mini-Retreats

Explore the excuses and thought patterns that might get in your way and discover strategies to overcome them.

### 4. Commit to Mini-Retreats

New habits need reinforcing. This page is a place for you to formally declare your commitment to a more relaxed life and to track your Mini-Retreats.

### **5. Create Reminders and Supportive Environments**

Shape your world to support relaxed living. Learn to use regular parts of your daily life to trigger a Mini-Retreat. Discover sanctuaries in your environment and get inspired to create new ones.

### **6. Join the Mini-Retreats Community**

Share your breakthroughs and positive experiences online and connect with other people who are committed to a happier, more relaxed way of life.

**Section II** provides a wide variety of Mini-Retreats to choose from, grouped according to time of day and your current environment. I've scripted dozens of Mini-Retreats and customized them for a range of needs and situations. Please explore whatever you feel drawn to.

**Section III** offers additional resources to make your Mini-Retreat experience the best it can be.

Once you read through Section I, feel free to skip around in the book. I encourage you to try new Mini-Retreats from time to time. You may also want to try the "Guided Mini-Retreats" (available on CD or as an MP3 download), in which I narrate a selection of Mini-Retreats while you drift away. Whatever works best for you ... go for it!

In support of your health, happiness and success,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop on the 'J' and a long tail on the 'a'.

## Red Light Relaxation

*Oftentimes, a red traffic light feels like a stressor, a barrier that keeps you stuck in traffic and prevents you from moving forward. Instead of wasting this time, recognize it as a quick time-out to relax.*



30 SECONDS-  
2 MINUTES

### *Begin*

- Drop your shoulders, shake yourself loose and settle into your seat.

### *Retreat*

- Take a few long, deep breaths.
- Stretch your body.
- Tune in to the scenery around you and the sky above.

### *Complete*

- When the light turns green, focus on driving safely.

### *Variation:*

- Laugh out loud.
- Say something that triggers good feelings inside.
- Take a few deep breaths and stretch your body.

Ted had a habit of getting irritated on the road, so I challenged him to a full week of Red Light Relaxation, taking each one as an opportunity to relax and recharge. He agreed to give it a try. A week later, Ted reported back. He was genuinely surprised by the changes he felt! His commute seemed to pass much faster and he felt more focused and energized when he arrived.

## Mini-Vacation

*We all have experienced places that foster deep rest and relaxation—white sandy beaches, towering mountains, deep forests, beautiful meadows and other places of natural beauty. You can retreat to these places in your imagination to restore yourself throughout the day.*



2-10 MINUTES



PROPS:  
RELAX, RECHARGE,  
REFRESH -  
GUIDED MINI-  
RETREATS FOR  
BUSY PEOPLE CD,  
TRACK 7

### Begin

- Find a quiet space where you will be uninterrupted.
- Settle down in a chair, close your eyes and take a deep breath.
- Notice the support of your chair and the ground underneath your feet.

### Retreat

- In your imagination, travel to a special place of rest and relaxation. This could be a beautiful beach, a pristine forest, a mountain meadow or any other place that feels good for you.
- Take some time to really settle into this beautiful place.
- Notice the smells of this place, the colors and shapes of the landscape surrounding you, the warmth of the sun or the cool breeze on your skin.
- When you feel truly settled, explore this place. Maybe you would like to go for a walk. Enjoy the peace and beauty.
- When you feel complete, let the image go, knowing that you can return to this place of rest and relaxation at any time in the future.



# Rise Above

*When facing a challenge, sometimes we can't see the solution because we are too close to the problem. To gain a fresh perspective and open yourself up to new ideas, try this.*



2-10 MINUTES



PROPS:  
PEN & PAPER



## *Begin*

- Close your eyes and relax.

## *Retreat*

- Imagine yourself a bird and fly high up into the sky.
- Feel the fresh breeze and enjoy the sensation of soaring upward, high above everything.
- Look down on your current life, situation, challenge or work. What do you see?
- If your challenge were a landscape, what kind of landscape would it be?
- From this perspective, what do you see is needed?
- What advice would you give to yourself, way down there in the midst of it all?

## *Complete*

- Bring your mind back to your room.
- Jot down any information you received.
- How can you apply this experience and perspective to your life, situation, challenge or work?

Mike was struggling with a team project, so I asked him what image came to mind when he thought about the project. He immediately saw many sailboats moving in the same direction. As he observed the sailboats more closely, he noticed some were moving fast, setting a brisk pace, while other boats lagged behind. This gave him insight into the problems on his team. He encouraged the group to support each other more often, and a week later he reported that his “fleet” was now moving swiftly toward the completion of their project.

# Compassion for Yourself

*This Mini-Retreat is a great gift to give yourself when your mind is ruminating on an event from the past and going through all the steps of what you “should” have done differently.*

*To develop compassion, it is good to begin with yourself. After all, if you cannot make peace with your own vulnerabilities, quirks and insecurities, how can you be compassionate toward others?*



2-5 MINUTES



## *Begin*

- Sit comfortably and close your eyes.

## *Retreat*

- Recall a situation when you acted in a way that you feel ashamed or guilty about.
- Embrace yourself in the place of guilt or shame. It helps to wrap your arms around your torso.
- Knowing that you did the best you could in the situation, embrace yourself with forgiveness.



## *Complete*

- Decide how you want to act when a similar situation presents itself in the future.
- Come back relieved and relaxed.



“On a long weekend with friends, I opened up about some inner struggles I was having. After the weekend, I was feeling regretful and ashamed about showing my vulnerabilities. With this Mini-Retreat I experienced a wave of forgiveness and acceptance of my humanity, realizing that it wasn’t weak to share the way I did. I saw it was actually an act of strength to open up with people I trust. I came away with a greater sense of confidence in my instincts, more open and compassionate about myself and others, and best of all, feeling closer to the friends whom I can now support more deeply in return.”

~ Tracy McMicking, *Life Coach*

# Lessons from Nature

*Nature is a great teacher. When you feel bogged down by the demands of life and need to shift your perspective, go for a quick stroll in nature. Head to a city park or garden, or simply step outside and look up to the sky for a moment.*



2-5 MINUTES



PROPS:  
PEN & PAPER



## Begin

- Observe your surroundings.

## Retreat

- Begin asking yourself questions such as, “What can the cloud formations teach me about the next step in my project?” “How would this bee look at my challenge?” “What would be possible if I moved like water in this situation?”

## Complete

- Jot down notes about your observations and insights, then return to work on your project with a fresh mind.

## Variation:

- If you are unable to physically step out of the office, imagine a time when you were outside and ask for guidance from this inner landscape.

“WHEN YOU CHANGE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT THINGS, THE THINGS YOU LOOK AT CHANGE.” ~ *David Bohm*