



#MonthlyMotivation Power of the Pause
Presented by Suzanne Vickers, February 17, 2026

[Suzanne] Well, welcome everyone. So happy to be here today. Good morning, Buckeyes. My name is Suzanne Vickers and I'm one of your internal OSU EAP counselors. Today we're going to talk about the power of the pause.

So, I think that we're all aware that pausing between tasks is important, but what happens when we don't pause? Our brains stay in a sympathetic nervous system state. That is, we're kind of ramped up, going from task to task, probably not breathing sufficiently, and likely our bodies are in a stressful place. This type of pushing and doing can diminish your ability to concentrate fully and may even keep your heart rate up. Then we end up drained and frazzled at the end of the day. Sound familiar? Lack of pausing and getting into a little bit of motion can also increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. Pausing can feel like we're cheating or we're failing. In a Psychology Today article, it points to the idea of the work ethic and how we've been conditioned to believe that if we work hard, it is a virtue and if we rest or pause, we are suspect. Maybe we even feel guilty for pausing.

According to an article from the American Psychological Association, taking regular breaks helps us to be more resilient when stressors arise, and they function as an intervention to help us deal with the daily grind. I don't know about you all, but I find myself eating lunch at my desk, moving from task to task on my schedule, and forget to even go to the bathroom sometimes. This powering through can do us more harm than good. Research is now showing that giving ourselves space between tasks during the workday, but also in our personal lives can revitalize us and even prevent burnout. Taking these micro breaks can improve our ability to pay attention. There was a study done by a professor at George Mason University that showed that when university students taking a test took a five-minute break in a 45 minute time period performed better than those who didn't take a break. Other research has shown the same thing that we get worn out by paying attention for long periods of time. And a quote from William Helton, the professor at George Mason University, is we don't know exactly what in the brain gets depleted, but when we do a cognitively demanding task, it operates as though there's a mental fuel that gets burned up. Taking breaks also can improve our mood. Whether the break is relaxing, doing some breathing exercises,



stretching, meditating, resting, social, texting a friend perhaps, talking to a colleague, or cognitive reading, watching a funny video. Taking a micro break increases productivity and engagement with our work and in our personal lives.

Pausing allows us to pay attention to three important well-being areas: physical, mental, and emotional. It helps us to listen to our inner physical signals. Our bodies know before we do that we need a break. We may have fatigue, a headache, or tight shoulders, a feeling in our stomachs. We may be feeling an emotion. Pausing can give us space to process that feeling and move through it or pay attention to it later. For example, after work mentally, how is our thinking? Are we focusing on negative aspects of life or thinking about what we are grateful for? When we do take a break, it allows our brains to connect to our creativity, think, shower ideas. And pausing can assist us in prioritizing what really matters and what the next right action or step is to take. It also activates our parasympathetic nervous system, which is that rest and digest part of the nervous system, calming us and regulating things like our heart rate and blood pressure.

So, start with some simple steps. Take a 5 to 10 minute break every hour to stretch, walk around, get some water, talk to a colleague. Take a break away from your screen, whether your computer or phone. Gaze at a tree or building outside of your window, or if you're home, look at something you treasure. Schedule time away from social media on a weekend day, perhaps. Do something creative instead, or go for a hike. Schedule lunch with some friends or a loved one. Journal, garden, cook. Give your brain a break. Use your pauses as times to reflect on your thinking, your beliefs, and questioning your assumptions. Start looking at your work schedule and set some boundaries with your time in meetings, etc. Schedule in pauses. We call them breathers here at the AP, on your calendar. Using your phone to set hourly reminders to take a micro break can be helpful. Even having an accountability buddy at work who also takes breaks. When you do take a break, notice what your mind does. Do you feel anxious or nervous? If so, utilize some grounding or breathing techniques to calm your nervous system or get up and jump up and down, my boss's favorite technique, to release the stress. Listen to a song on your phone, as most songs are just a few minutes long, can be helpful to help you feel uplifted, motivated, or relaxed. Find your own way to fill your pauses. If you



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need support with pausing, you can always reach out to us here at the EAP for counseling or with a work life resource for life coaching.

And just to remind you of our five complimentary counseling sessions for issue per rolling calendar year. Hope you enjoyed this workshop today and open to comments.