



EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN'S COACHING

How To Be On Vacation Every Day

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Do you love the feeling of being on vacation when your mind is quieter and you are carefree, lighthearted, and ready for adventure? Do you delight in seeing new surroundings with fresh eyes fully taking in the gifts your place of vacation has to offer? So often we deeply desire a slower pace where we are free of the hectic pace of life. In our hearts, we want to show up for life and be present to the people and experiences we encounter. We long to be in the moment and treasure the fleeting experience of a human life. One of the best bets we've found to reawaken and be here now is to go on vacation where it is easier to stand apart from the busyness of life. Well, what if we could bring the experience of being on vacation to everyday life? What if we could inject more presence, more lightness, more self-nourishment, and more pleasure and joy into our days, hours, and minutes? The good news is that we can. We don't have to wait until August or the winter holidays or until we've saved enough money to travel. We could actually step out of the endless demands that our minds make to perform, earn money, and get things done. We can take a vacation in any moment even amidst our responsibilities and never ending to do lists.

As a child I was on "vacation" as much as possible. I went on long neighborhood adventures with friends. I caught tadpoles and watched them grow over time in a homemade pond. I ate tomatoes right out of our garden cherishing each delish bite. I looked for constellations in the sky and wondered about extraterrestrial life. I took catnaps and laid in the grass. I spent hours reading, playing with our family pets, and making up imaginary worlds. As an adult with more responsibility and a family of my own, my ability to "vacation" on a daily basis has waned. Truthfully, there have been many days when I hardly stop. I get up early and exercise, squeeze in as many emails as I can before waking my kids. I get the kids off to school and I am back at my desk less than 60 seconds after walking into my home office. I schedule clients back to back, sneaking in food, a load of laundry, and personal emails in the cracks of my day. I pick up the kids, cobble together dinner, tidy the house, provide homework help, feed our pets, talk to my husband and on a good night soak in our backyard hot tub (self-nourishment, check!). Then, you guessed it; I pass out and do it all over again. Now there are many ways I do intentionally nourish myself. Yet when I am busy and stressed, the pressure to perform and get things done leaves me disconnected from the potential pleasure and peace that exist in these experiences. Looking back I see there have been many days where I lived as if the purpose of life is to get things done instead of cherishing life, marveling at its wonders, and experiencing it fully.

In recent months, I have been practicing taking a "vacation" on a daily basis and gradually shifting so that rest, self-nourishment, and just being present are more central to my life. Some days I only vacation for a few minutes and some days I do it all day long. What matters most to me is to turn the light on in myself and be here to experience the life that is before me...because, like traveling to an exotic destination, life is full of opportunity for fun, wonder, awe, pleasure, gratitude, and joy.

There are many elements that have supported my journey so far (and of course there is more to be discovered). Here are three elements I would like to share now. I hope they will help you bring "vacation" to your everyday life.



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Element 1: Pause. One reason vacations are so prized is that they are a very real pause or break from the demands of life. It is so easy to live in a trance of doing and believing we “must” get things done that we are not even conscious of how this trance is separating us from what we cherish most...experiencing our life as it is actually happening. When we pause and observe what is here now (what do I feel now? what am I experiencing now?) we can begin to more fully inhabit our moments and our lives. So I actually mean in the midst of your day, pause, breathe, take the present in as fully as you can. It takes much less time than you think. Pause and scan your body to observe your own thoughts, emotions, and body sensations without judgment. Look out and see your environment with fresh eyes. Really look. Just last week I realized after living in my house for 9 months that we have two redwood trees growing in our backyard. Where have I been? What kind of “doing” zombie have I become that I was so blind to the beauty right outside my backdoor? When we awaken out of the trance of doing, we begin to recognize the many remarkable sights and experiences out there in everyday life just waiting to be noticed and enjoyed.

Element 2: Trust. Vacations create a space for us to trust that we can put our busy lives on hold and get away. If we want to let go in our daily lives, trust is essential. We need to trust that we can stop, take a break, and take our eyes off the anticipated future. Yet our minds so often compel us into doing. The survival of our ancestors depended on their ability to be vigilant and on alert for mortal dangers. Those who survived passed on these “alert” genes. So in our evolution we actually became wired to be wary and vigilant. Our system is rigged to believe that something bad waits right around the corner. We come to believe that we must keep taking action and actively manage our lives to protect ourselves. The answer to free ourselves from this mind challenge is to actively cultivate trust. Trust that if we let go, pause, and cease the endless doing (even just for a little while) that we will be okay. Trust that we can handle life’s challenges when they arise rather than living in chronic anticipation of risk. A few days ago, I was taking a shower and I caught myself in the act of distrusting. My mind was racing out ahead of me making mental lists of all the things I needed to do in the next 30 minutes followed by several rounds of rehearsing the list lest I forget something on it. Then I reconsidered. “Alison, can you just be here in the shower? Can you feel the water and enjoy the solitude? Can you let go and trust that everything will be handled?” In my 40 years, I have not damaged my life beyond repair because I forgot something or didn’t get everything done on a to do list. I took a deep breath and focused on the warmth of the water. Voila! Hot running water + pause + trust = Mini-vacation in the shower!

Element 3: Put the Behavior Before the Belief. Since our minds are not always willing to go along with our desire to pause, trust, and bring vacation into everyday life, sometimes we have to outsmart what our mind tells us. We need to be willing (perhaps courageously) to engage in daily vacation behavior even when our mind tells us we don’t have time, we’ll do it after we meet a deadline, or that it is too risky. We need to put the behavior before the belief. So yes, I am saying go through the motions. Take mini-vacations even if they initially create more stress than they relieve. Breathe deeply, play, laugh, meditate (even if you stink at it) and use your five senses to fully see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Go get a massage on your lunch hour. Take a walk in nature. Sit in a garden. Read a book under a tree. And if your mind is screaming at you, let it scream. As you engage in vacation behavior, your mind will eventually simmer down as you begin to reconnect with the parts of yourself that can fully breathe, relax, mindfully exist, and be on vacation.

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