Ideas to Stay Busy in Slow Times

Whether you’re experiencing a slow down at work because of normal business cycles or due to unforeseen disruptions, you have a responsibility—to yourself and to your organization—to identify opportunities for staying productive. If you’re struggling to find them, the ideas listed here will help get you started.

- **Ask your teammates how you can support them.** Your slow time might coincide with someone else’s busy time. Offer to lend a hand and, the next time you’re overloaded, maybe they’ll return the favor!

- **Keep a list of “slow time projects.”** During busy times, as you think of things you’d like to do but just don’t have time for, make a note! Refer back to this list when slow times (inevitably) arise.

- **Use the time to get ahead.** Slow times won’t last forever! What planning and preparation can you do now to put yourself (and your leaders) in a strong position when things get busy again?

- **Engage in professional development.** Attend webinars, read books, maybe even get that certification you’ve been thinking about. And remember: When you find a great resource or learn a useful strategy, share it with your colleagues!

- **Create/update procedural documentation for your most critical tasks.** This can be a lengthy project but it’s essential for business continuity. When you’re out of the office, others need to fill the gaps. Having procedures ready to go will help minimize disruption and keep things moving smoothly no matter what.

- **Organize your physical space.** Now is a great time to reassess your work area. Get rid of clutter, rearrange your set up, adjust the lighting, add some simple décor, etc. You’ll be surprised how a few minor alterations can have a dramatic impact on productivity and mental health.

- **Organize your electronic space.** Clean up your computer! Purge and archive outdated items, restructure your filing system to make retrieval faster and easier, and clear out your email inbox.
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- **Review/create your career plan.** Evaluate where you are in your career and how you got here. Next, define where you want to be 3, 5, even 10 years from now. Then, create a step-by-step road map to help you get from here to there.

- **Organize upcoming projects.** Project Management is an exhausting process. Often, we skip the most important parts because we just don’t have the time. While things are slow, get your future projects organized by creating a concrete plan of action.

- **Create/update your LinkedIn profile.** LinkedIn is the gold standard for online professional networking. To develop a strong reputation, you need a comprehensive, up-to-date profile.

- **Connect with and expand your network.** Reach out to colleagues, mentors, trusted advisors, etc. Suggest having a brief phone call or meeting for a virtual coffee. Staying in touch with your network makes it easier to ask for help if and when you need it.

- **Tackle that persistent problem you’ve been avoiding.** You know the one. Stop working around it. Get creative, solve the problem, create a plan for implementation, and present your solution to the necessary leaders.

- **Inquire with your leaders.** If you’ve exhausted all of your ideas, ask your leaders what projects or tasks they’ve been putting off and volunteer to take over.

- **Take care of yourself.** Enjoy the slow time while it lasts! Recognize that it’s okay to NOT feel totally overloaded and stressed out all the time. You’ll get there again soon enough…but for now, focus on re-energizing and taking things slowly.