

# The importance of strategic disconnection

By: Veronica Cool Special to the Daily Record April 11, 2015



COOL TIPS

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Among the swaying palm trees, ice-cold Presidentes and fried plantains, I found myself working. During a family reunion & vacation, my family was frolicking in the surf of Macao Beach, off the eastern coast of my homeland, the Dominican Republic, while I was working, or rather thinking.

“You all work too hard, there’s not enough fun or family time” chastised my brother, the executive president for a global hotel chain, who chooses to live in the Dominican Republic. He got me thinking about the opportunity cost of work, time and life.

Who says I have to do every single task, whether at home or the business? Is my time not more impactful as a strategist? Should I not outsource or delegate tasks like research or scheduling meetings?

I’m a perpetual student, and every day I learn something new – and that day’s lesson was “taking the time to think instead of getting lost in the minutia of busyness.” Although I did over-enjoy my plantains (with fried cheese and sautéed onions! A Dominican delicacy), I invested some mental capital and energy on my strategic plan, including developing a joint venture and hiring some key positions.

Furthermore, by being strategically disconnected, I was able to process decisions that tend to become complicated and murky, like opting to participate in a nonprofit committee. Sometimes, I need to be selfish and put on my own oxygen mask first. By disconnecting on this trip, I was able to recharge, enjoy my family, especially seeing my Papi’s joy at having his rambunctious family all around. That’s the legacy I’m aiming for, a powerful, deeply-rooted tradition of great experiences and memories.

To continue to build this legacy, I need to prioritize spending time with the family, meaning more time on the island. This realization led me to notice the untapped potential of the island, in particular, exporting and educational opportunities. And these opportunities should be explored and not just in the D.R., but other international markets.

Exporting is a viable economic tool, predominantly because 95 percent of the world’s consumers are OUTSIDE of the USA. Last week, Maria Contreras-Sweet, the SBA administrator, was in Annapolis promoting the State Trade and Export Promotion (STEP)

Program, which has a goal of creating bold market opportunities for entrepreneurs across the nation.

Results for the STEP program have been very strong, particularly in Maryland, which received \$1.2 million over two previous years. All told, 118 Maryland businesses participated, resulting in \$29 billion in reported exports sales by Maryland small businesses. And exporting includes not just tangible goods, like machinery and agricultural products, but also services. It's a reminder that your expertise is a valuable commodity. Right now, I'm developing a training curriculum to export to the Dominican Republic around entrepreneurship, leadership and empowerment.

Honestly, I really wanted to sit in a hut, with the breeze blowing through the open doors and post on Facebook, "Another hard day at the office."

Educational and fellowship opportunities also exist to study and work temporarily abroad; the U.S. Agency for International Development and the State Department (to name a few) have many programs, and not just partnering with the Dominican Republic but also with other countries. These programs are extraordinarily enriching experiences to develop culturally relevant skills while fostering an appreciation for the liberties and benefits of the USA.

In 2012, I participated in a cultural and economic mission to Spain, a program hosted in partnership with Fundacion Carolina, Lideres Hispanos and the Embassy of Spain. For seven jam-packed days, I discovered the thriving economy of Madrid and Valencia; seven of the 10 largest global logistics companies originated in Spain. Who knew?

Of course the wine and food were delicious (I gained five pounds .... I have little self-control when it comes to Manchego cheese.) We traveled via high-speed train to Valencia, a stunning Renaissance city on the Mediterranean that rivals New York City with its innovative art and gastro scenes. We also toured the port of Valencia, a thriving economic vehicle, currently the 5th-busiest in all of Europe.

This experience was enriching, informative and eye-opening.

Each adventure, whether in the Dominican Republic or Spain, pushed me out of my routine, helping me see life from a different perspective, creating new opportunities that have certainly tweaked my master plan.

It's funny, how productivity is measured in hours, and we proudly tout, "I worked 70 hours last week!" Or "I just put in a 12-hour day!" In reality, taking the time to extricate yourself from the day-to-day minutia to think and explore increases effectiveness and productivity dramatically.

And the impact of strategically disconnecting has a tremendous effect on vision and the direction of our journey. In short, go ahead and book the trip, (Southwest does fly direct to

Punta Cana now) take NONE of your work/files, solely your mind and the desire to strategize and explore.  
Till next time.

*\*This article was originally posted on The Daily Record.*

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