



**WORKPLACE
PRODUCTIVITY**

Juliet Funt

Is Social Conformity Costing You Your Lunch Break?

We don't get out enough. I'm not talking about daring adventures like Christmas in Bali or even a wild birthday night out. I'm referring to the fact that during the day's work most of us shy away from the perimeter of the building like we were under house arrest.

Only one in five office workers reports taking an actual lunch break away from their desk, much less outside of the office, with only one in three office workers claiming to take any sort of lunch break at all.

Research shows that skipping your lunch break decreases your working memory by 76%, cognitive control by 47%, and emotional control by 80%.

Skipping lunch,

and the sedentary, desk-anchored life style that comes with it increases the risk of obesity, odds of developing Type 2 Diabetes, and the likelihood of depression.

All because we can't escape the sucking vortex of work long enough to grab a turkey wrap.

WHAT KEEPS US GLUED TO OUR CHAIRS?

Why do we struggle so much to leave our desks? For some, it's a level of peer pressure; social conformity keeps us glued to our chairs. Our colleagues scarf down their lunch at the desk and we feel obligated to do the same. Many simply experience such overwhelming workloads that they can barely justify stepping away to use the restroom, let alone actually going out to enjoy a meal.

But we can learn about ways to start to eliminate low-value workload tasks one after the other. And as those tasks start to peel away, as that pressure begins to alleviate ever so slightly, maybe you will allow yourself to step away occasionally.

If you do—we will be cheering you



(There are) ways to start to eliminate low-value workload tasks—(and) maybe you will allow yourself to step away occasionally.



on as you fortify your body, your mind, and your memory.

FIVE STEPS TO HELP YOU TRANSITION

It may help ease into the transition by breaking the process down over time into these five steps:

- First, just stay at your desk. Unpack your sandwich, throw back a few grapes, and crack that bottle of water, but turn off your phone, close your laptop, and put your computer to sleep. Cut the technology and distractions out of your time, but know that they're all right there if something changes.
- Introduce a new perspective. This time, stay at your desk, but move away from your normal work orientation. Visually change your environment by switching to the other side of your desk or rolling your chair over a few yards.



The only way to break that trend of peer pressure is to create a new one.



- Then take it a step further. Take lunch away from your desk, but don't leave the building. Snag a conference room, maybe use the "break" room for what it was named after? If you're feeling particularly bold, you could even invite a co-worker to join you.

• It's a big, beautiful world out there, go enjoy it! Take your grub and go find a bench or a curb outside

your building where you can take in some much needed sunshine and fresh air. Maybe even consider packing an extra sandwich to share with a friend.

- Then it's time to run with the big kids. Take the leap and go out once in a while. Get away and enjoy a leisurely, relaxed lunch break away from campus.

The only way to break that trend of peer pressure is to create a new one.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

There is a powdered liquid meal replacement that is taking the tech sector by storm, called — and I kid you not—Soylent. Developers are living on this stuff so they never have to take breaks to eat.

For every one of them, we need one of us—a lunch pioneer; a brave soul who is willing to push back from the screen, turn around and walk out toward the sunshine. ▲

Juliet Funt is the owner and founder of WhiteSpace at Work (<http://www.whitespaceatwork.com/>). It is her mission to unearth the potential of companies by unburdening their talent. Funt teaches a streamlined method for personal process improvement, leading to more creativity and engagement. She helps executives, managers and teams answer the critical question, "What thoughts deserve my full attention today?" Funt addressed the ACUMA Conference in Washington, D.C., last fall. We received her permission to reprint this article in the Pipeline.