

THE WORLD OF BUSINESS & LEADERSHIP
NEEDS MORE VIOLINS

by

David Cynkin

A THESIS

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Approved: Prof. Dan Howard, Ph.D.
Primary Thesis Advisor

Why should you have a “violin” if you want to be a successful leader? Albert Einstein quotes, “*Life without music was inconceivable for me. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music. I get most joy in life from music.*” Einstein utilized music and his violin as a means for him to express himself and clear his mind. This hobby enabled him to step back from the stresses of his professional life and look at challenges from a different perspective. In the world of Business, major executives and leaders share this frame of thinking by incorporating other hobbies into their lifestyle. Studies and articles show that using unique hobbies to alleviate stress can directly connect to more effective leadership and work performance. This is shown through studies of participants engaging in activities and recording the effects on stress-levels when utilized into lives where work dominates someone's daily schedule. There are also interviews with these Business leaders who support their success with the benefits that come from utilizing their unique hobbies into their lives in order to continue being a successful leader of others and themselves. My research will show the positive correlation of how these seemingly only recreational activities actually have the ability to make you a more successful leader when it comes to professional work and life goals.

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Literature Review

How The Right Kind of Play Can Help Work

There is a significant connection between enhancing work performance and leadership with inversely minimizing stress. (Tynan 2017). Stress is something that can be minimized by engaging in hobbies or passionate activities that may be unique to each person. (CDC 2021). Engaging hobbies are classified as primary mind stimulating activities. These are activities that require the performer of the activity to be the primary actor of the engagement. These can be seen in the form of running, hiking, surfing, skiing, playing music, painting, or other stimulating activities where the performer is acting in first person.

As a possible counter-argument to this concept, not every form of leisurely activity is going to be a productive outlet that has the same beneficial work-performance effects. Activities such as: watching TV, scrolling through social media, and other related activities would not yield the same benefits as the primary stimulating activities. This is because these activities are actions that are performed in the second-person by watching and indirectly viewing the event taking place. Especially at the end of a hard week of work, solely watching TV or being on the computer/ phone does not have the benefits of the primary stimulating “active relaxation” hobbies. (Parker-Pope 2022). With the primary activities, the participant is actively engaging with the activity in a more direct way in which the mind can be stimulated in more beneficial ways than the secondary

viewing activities. Incorporating these activities into your lifestyle can be extremely beneficial to long-term mental and physical health when involved with tedious work and leadership stressors. (Tynan 2017).

Leaders Who Incorporate Passion To Enhance Their Work

Einstein used his violin and classical music to stimulate his creativity which had a positive effect on his innovative discoveries at work (Krutz 2020). This seemingly pure recreational activity allowed Einstein to make these breakthrough discoveries not by depending fully on increasing his academic knowledge, but by playing an instrument to tap into his imagination (Krutz 2020). Einstein's son also supports this concept in an interview: *"Whenever he felt that he had come to the end of the road or into a difficult situation in his work, he would take refuge in his music, and that would usually resolve all his difficulties."* (Hans). This shows that Einstein's Violin made a powerful correlation to his success in making revolutionary discoveries and becoming an innovative thinker.

This concept of using creative outlets for helping work performance and thought processing relates to business in the way that many modern CEOs within the Fortune 500 (largest companies based in the U.S) are sharing Einstein's way of thinking. Business leaders like David Solomon, CEO of Goldman Sachs, is a passionate DJ on the side of his job which allows him to detach from the constant stress from the demands of his job (Bunea 2018). This allows him and many other business leaders to improve their work

performance and enhance their relationship connection by having time to put importance on their leisure activities which grants them a way to come back to work refreshed (Bunea 2018). Another example is of George Barret who was a professional musician before he worked his way into being a major healthcare industry business executive. He quotes, “While music is something I enjoy outside work, it’s also impacted how I lead. Recently, I gave a TED talk at TEDx Columbus where I shared this experience, what I learned, and how my eclectic, “nontraditional,” background has shaped me as a leader.” (Barret 2016). George also explains how this unique part of who he is allows him to understand different perspectives and sees them in a positive light when it comes to his coworkers. This frame of thinking helps him lead a global healthcare company with over 36,000 employees. (Barret 2016).

A leader in business that I have been able to personally meet and connect with on a monthly basis is the CFO of University of Oregon, Jamie Moffit. She has an extremely busy work-life that is constantly filled with meetings and problem-solving that is dynamic and changing every day. I am able to meet with her one-on-one and with my cohort of 12 other students because I am in a paid-internship program with the University of Oregon where we complete projects in different finance departments that are all overseen by Jamie. I got to ask her about the topics of this thesis as well for some primary research feedback. My question to her was, ““How might your work performance change if you were to stop doing your hobby?” I was interested to hear her answer as it relates to the other leaders I have done case studies on. She had three main points to her response: “Engaging with my hobby every week helps give an outlet to my

stressful workload which helps me work more effectively in the long run. If I couldn't play ultimate frisbee, I would have to find another hobby that I could do. If I don't have that outlet, I can't sleep as well. This would hinder my work performance by not having that detachment from stress.” (Jamie Moffit 2023). This shows how Jamie utilizes her passionate hobby of ultimate frisbee every week to separate her mind from her massively busy work schedule. She went on to explain how a balance of work and doing something that gives your energy and relaxation is crucial to maintain sustainable long-term motivation to work hard everyday and tackle stress.

A counter argument can be made for professionals whose work is very intensive in terms of time and focus. Like we see in the field of medicine and surgery, it can be questioned as to whether it is as beneficial to those professionals to take time away from their important studies when looking at work performance. In fact, it is actually shown that even intensive professions like in the medical field can benefit from productive downtime to stimulate their cognitive ability and prevent focus burnout. An article by Penn Medicine interviews Sean Grady, MD, who is a brain surgeon who utilizes an interesting hobby when he is not at work. From the article, “A Brain Surgeon Finds a Sweet Hobby,” Sean’s hobby is to be a beekeeper for fun and harvest honey. He talks about how this hobby requires great focus and attention or else he may be stung and hurt. “I find this process meditative, and can take my mind away from things at work that I may have been dwelling on.” (Grady 2017). From interacting with his environment and learning new things in an interesting way, in the form of keeping bees, he is actively participating in an activity that can help refresh his mind like we see in the other leaders

and business executives. Especially in the field of medicine and neurosurgery, Grady explains how vital it is to have a balance of passion and profession within your life for a healthy long-term outlook. “Medicine is an all-consuming passion—it is much more than a job. The problem is that this passion can be overwhelming sometimes. So, it is important to find some other intellectually engaging pursuit to balance that passion, so that your whole identity is not subsumed into this one thing.” (Grady 2017). This is important to keep in mind because many professions can cause the person to get too caught up in one thing which can lead to burnout and inevitable loss in work performance. Grady also talks about how different professions require different time commitments, and it is important to try to find a hobby that can be worked within your schedule. “You have to pick something that accommodates the type of schedule that you have as a doctor. – You have to figure out something that can be done within that framework. You could be an artist, write, or even beekeep. Whatever you choose has to fit in with the kind of specialty you have chosen.” (Grady 2017). As we see with Grady and previous professional leaders, finding a productive outlet to take your mind off the everyday thoughts of work-life can have a distinctive positive impact on your overall health and future work performance. While different hobbies can help with specific attributes like focus, creativity, management, and confidence, it is clear that they all can have a beneficial impact on how you lead your life in many fields of professional environments.

Different Violins For Different People

Choosing the right hobby to help with structured downtime, (free-time organized to implement stimulating leisure), can be difficult for some. For each different person, there is a unique version of Einstein's violin that can help someone with their work performance and leadership lifestyle. What is meant by this is that someone does not need to specifically stick to the hobbies that Einstein and the other Business leaders used in order to receive the same benefits. To get started with finding what primary stimulating activity might be the right one for you, an article in the New York Times explains how it is important to keep in mind a few sources of inspiration. First, think about something you have always wanted to do or try. Second, look back to your childhood to understand what you may have been naturally interested in ever since you were little. Third, think about what relates to how you like spending your time now and with who. Finally, just take the first step by participating in a class, lesson, or group meetup relating to your interests found from the previous steps. (Parker-Pope 2022).

After taking the steps to implement your interests into primary stimulating activities, it is important to notice unique benefits that come from performing each different hobby. Physical hobbies such as running, walking, or hiking can be utilized to help your sleep, lower stress-levels, and stabilize your emotional balances. (CDC 2021). For more creative hobbies like music, it allows us to form better mental pathways that helps us form better language comprehension and dictation. (Mitchum 2021). "Music improves the connections to the central processes of the brain, much like increasing a computer's RAM from a gigabyte to a terabyte." (Mitchum 2021). Other unconventional

hobbies like painting and drawing are shown to also help relax your daily stress responses quickly as well as give a boost to self confidence. (Otto 2016). These findings support how everyone working in a job with constant stressors can find a unique activity specific to their interests that can help them have the same beneficial effects of lowering stress to help their leadership habits.

These concepts can be connected to myself from a personal experience. Instead of a violin like Einstein used, I would say that my “violin” would be my surfboard. I have been surfing for over five years and have been a part-time surf instructor for some of the summers when I am back in my home of San Diego. Whenever I would come across a problem or rough spot in my summer classes or internship, I would go surfing by the end of the day if I could not get past it when I was working. When I was out there in the ocean surfing, I felt truly connected to my environment and separated from the stresses of work-life. I am able to actively relax my mind while still learning something new at the same time. After I get out of the water, I feel refreshed and see those same problems from before in a different perspective. This is because I was able to reset my mind in a similar way to what Einstein would do with playing his violin. When I got back to work, I was able to be more focused and connect with my co-workers on a deeper level because of my refreshed perspective and increased mental capacity. Because of this active outlet of leisure, I am able to utilize it as a means of getting my mental state back on track to be focused on solving problems and leading in my work-life more effectively. This same concept can carry over to anyone who can implement these activities into their lives as a

supplement when they are having a tough time at work in terms of leadership burnout or relationship connectivity.

The Long-term Benefits of Utilizing Unique Passions in Your Lifestyle

Not only does this concept relate to certain business leaders and innovators like Einstein, but it has been shown that everyone can gain the same benefits of well-being and better work performance when incorporating passionate hobbies into their daily lives (Zawadzki 2015). These discoveries and relationships are significant because leadership related stressors can negatively affect the actual ability to lead effectively as well as maintain quality leader-follower relationships (Tynan 2017). These downfalls of leadership related stressors can be alleviated by physical activity (CDC 2021) or creative activities, like painting or music (Otto 2016). These activities are all hobbies that improve mental health, reduce stress, and improve social connection (Parkhurst 2021) which are all crucial factors in maintaining effective and successful leadership over long periods of time (Tynan 2017).

Methods

To introduce the methods of how I will support my Thesis topic, I will primarily use the case studies of innovative thinkers and business leaders to connect how stimulating hobbies can boost work performance and alleviate leadership burnout. I will analyze the instances that Albert Einstein talks about experiences where he utilizes music and his violin to better his performance at work. I will support these instances with quotes from Einstein himself as well as interviews from his son where he details events where Albert would find refuge in his musical passion to get through problems he would run into at work. This concept will then be related to the personal experiences and reports of modern CEOs and business leaders who share that same frame of thinking. These reports will be from direct responses to interviews or articles from what has been researched from those leadership professionals. The business leaders will be selected based on their specific industries they lead in. Many of the leaders will be involved in high-stress and constant work environments while also maintaining a positive attitude toward the concept of utilizing hobbies to help with work performance.

The relation of mindsets between Albert Einstein and other business leaders will be connected with the supporting evidence from specific case studies and experiments. The evidence will consist of real experimental articles that support the detriment of work performance due to stress. This will also analyze the case studies that show how people in certain jobs that have constant obligations with high-intensity can be more affected by stress than others. This concrete evidence will support the personal experiences of Einstein and business leaders and how their mindsets are effective in improving work

performance and a sustainable leadership strategy for life. Also, I am gathering information from other articles to help support how many different types of hobbies can have similar beneficial effects on stress-levels and work performance as Einstein and Business Executives.

Outline

Abstract

- My introduction into the core concept to which this conversation was derived
- My contribution to this conversation
- How it connects to other factors that are significant to my major of Business

Literature Review

- How The Right Kind of Play Can Help Work
 - Leaders Who Incorporate Passion To Enhance Their Work
 - Different Violins For Different People
 - The Long-term Benefits of Utilizing Unique Passions in Your Lifestyle
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Timeline

Fall 2022:

- Present Prospectus
- Meet with CHC Thesis Advisor
- Meet with Business Primary Advisor

Winter 2023:

- Complete evidence and sources collection
- Complete analysis and synthesis of sources
- Meet with advisors
- Schedule thesis defense

Spring 2023:

- Complete rough draft and send to committee
 - Complete final draft and send to committee
 - Defend thesis
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