



THE PERFECT GIFT TO GIVE YOURSELF

BY SUE-ELLA PRODONOVICH

Who knows what the Nobel Laureate, [Herbert Simon](#), would have made of the world we live in today. More than fifty years ago, he warned that [“a wealth of information creates poverty of attention” \(pg 6\)](#) Since then, the rate of information growth has exploded to the point where in the past two years we apparently created more data than in the entirety of human history before then.

As the year closes and we try to make sense of how to work in a world saturated by hyper-connectivity, artificial intelligence, information overload and, of course, the wretched COVID-19 virus, I've come up with the perfect Christmas gift you can give yourself: your own attention. I mean your real attention - that is, contemplative, reflective, purposeful thought.

Yep, I want this to be a time that you stop and have a good long think. And, when you do, I reckon you should be thinking about these six things...

1. THINK ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO'VE HELPED YOU THIS YEAR

If your professional services practice is like most I know, it relies on relationships to bring in work. Then it needs human connections to get that work done. If that's the case, attention can be the currency that sets you apart.

So the first thing I want you to think about is the people who've contributed to your 2021: your clients, referral sources, colleagues, suppliers and advisors. Then call them to wish them a Merry Christmas/Happy New Year and let them know that they matter to you.

For instance, last month I received a phone call out of the blue from a senior partner of a large professional services firm. He called just to thank me for coaching one of his new partners back in 2020, and he was most apologetic for not having called earlier.

It would have been much easier for him to have not done this. The firm's HR Director had already provided feedback to me at the time so I probably didn't need a call and certainly didn't expect one. That's what made it so special. I was struck by the thoughtfulness of the gesture and he made me feel great about myself and the work I do.

It also made me realise that there was a reason this guy was well regarded as one of corporate Australia's very best deal makers and connectors.

2. THINK ABOUT GIVING BACK

Once you've thought about the important people around you, think about ways you can give back to them - especially when it comes to your most important clients and referrers. Most firms do this extraordinarily well on an organisational basis but, trust me, it counts for so much more when it's done individually.

This could, for example, mean thinking about their 2022 goals or the challenges they're likely to face. Invest some non-billable time in exploring scenarios with them about how they can achieve what they want to achieve. And tap into your networks of experts to give them some proper advice.

3. THINK ABOUT IMPLEMENTING SOMETHING NEW

A lot has changed over the past 24 months and, if there's one thing that chaos is good for, it's for spurring us on to come up with creative ideas. It's no coincidence that some of the most creative times in human history have also been the most tumultuous - think of Renaissance Italy or America during the Revolution.

It might not be on quite the same scale. However, if the past couple of years have sparked an idea for a new service, or a new way to work, this is the time to figure out how to make it happen.

Put some extra time in thinking things through and work out about how you can implement it in the new year. It doesn't have to be on the same scale as the Sistine Chapel or the US Constitution. In fact, it doesn't have to be anything permanent at all. Just lay the groundwork to pilot one of your ideas in 2022 and see how it works out.

4. THINK ABOUT HOSTING SOMETHING

The business lunch is *coming back into its own* - at least for the moment and at least in Sydney and Melbourne. So make work fun again. Take time to organise and convene a group-of-six for lunch in the New Year. Make sure there are no presentations and no agenda – just convivial conversation and cheerful company.

Enjoy yourself and enjoy the company of the people you haven't properly caught up with in some time. You deserve it, just as they do.

5. THINK ABOUT COACHING SOMEONE

One of the most important parts of our professional lives - and one that has taken a real hit over the pandemic - is the proper supervision of staff. With everyone working from home, it's been almost impossible to spend the time we should be with more junior employees - whether that's through having them shadow us or just spending a while to talk through the nitty gritty of their work (and ours).

So set aside some time to sit down with someone and work through a tricky situation they - or you - encountered earlier in the year. It should be something you didn't have the time to explain to them back then.

Alternatively, why not work through your professional development calendar from scratch. Double up on future-focused skills and on those things your more junior staff have missed out on over the pandemic.

6. THINK ABOUT OFFERING SUPPORT

Almost everyone I know has been going crazy getting through the billable work this year. So why not take a breather and switch your attention to supporting social or environmental cause?

Grab a cuppa and go through the details of your firm's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion plans. This could also be a good time to look at next year's pro bono opportunities, reconciliation actions or your firm's environmental agenda .

If you're feeling too overwhelmed to commit to a cause, why not keep it small? Go back to the first

idea. Just call someone to thank them and let them know you've got their back. Or read about the two big BD wins you can achieve in just 20 minutes.

WANT MORE?

I hope you have a wonderful and relaxing end of year break and that we have the opportunity to catch up in 2022. In the meantime, have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

ONE LAST QUOTE...

OK, given you've read this far, I'll leave you with one last quote, this one from Pico Iyer, the British travel writer.

“In an age of acceleration, nothing can be more exhilarating than going slow. And in an age of distraction, nothing is so luxurious as paying attention. And in an age of constant movement, nothing is so urgent as sitting still.”

Thanks again,
Sue-Ella.

FURTHER READING

Carr N (2008) *Is Google Making Us Stupid?* The Atlantic

Carr N (2010) *The Shallows, How The Internet is Changing The Way We Think, Read and Remember*, The Atlantic

Nicholas Carr on The Shallows, You Tube (1:05 mins), The John Adams Institute

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBoA6VZdJM8>

Csikszentmihalyi M (1998) *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*

Iyer, P (2014) *The Art of Stillness In An Age Of Distraction*

Simon H. A, (1971) “*Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World,*” in Martin Greenberger, *Computers, Communication, and the Public Interest*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, pp. 40–41. and [Carnegie-Mellon University 1969 pg 6.](#)



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