What is Leisure?

Is it just me—or do you agree that most Americans have a difficult time gearing down, getting off the bike and relaxing? Unless you get off the bike and allow yourself to recover, you won’t be recharged to get back on the bike Monday morning.

So—you’re off work and want to play. You realize that free time is play time—and that play balances out life. I suspect you know how to work—but not how to play because you’re not accustomed to enjoying the freedom of leisure. At work, you know what it expected of you, and measures are available to determine if you’ve achieved performance levels. Work processes are structured, planned and support is available if problems arise. However—leisure isn’t defined for us as concretely and our challenge is to find activities that are inherently satisfying with intrinsic meaning. Leisure is an activity you very much enjoy doing on your own terms; either alone or with someone, indoors or outdoors and most importantly, at the time you desire.

Leisure is freely chosen and can be spontaneous; with the emphasis on an affective experience—at the level of emotion. Ideally—you are emotionally engaged and the activity gives you intrinsic value. The critical element here is that the leisure activity is freely chosen by you--- not anyone else.

Play is leisure time—an opportunity to engage in an activity that brings you immediate, intrinsic pleasure. It is self-determined and in Latin it means “to be permitted.” If you’re not interested in doing a leisure activity, that’s also acceptable. Research indicates that how some of us spend our leisure time is related to our socioeconomic status, educational level and culture.

In affluent societies like America, some of us prefer to spend our leisure time spending money rather than engaging in other activities. The choice to spend money shopping is a remnant of our traditional, consumerist lifestyles. However, the time spent shopping finds us in a mall and not on the beach reading a book or enjoying a sunset.

Think on this:

1. Leisure can give add meaning and purpose to life when it carries intrinsic value.
2. Leisure helps us develop new skills that may generalize to other areas of our life.
3. Leisure enables us to discover more about ourselves—to grow and mature.
4. Leisure—when selected by you, on your terms—provides you with freedom and choice.
5. Leisure engenders discovery of our hidden capabilities—and who we can become.
6. Leisure empowers you to reevaluate and clarify what truly is important to you in terms of how you spend your free time.