

# Being Busy Made Me Feel Important, But Now I Feel at Peace



By Heather Picard | [Tiny Buddha](#)

**“You should sit in meditation for twenty minutes a day unless you are too busy, then you should sit for an hour.” ~Ancient Zen proverb**

I used to think that life was about powering through things. I'd grab a latte, write my to-do list, and proudly cram as many things as possible into my day.

At work, there was staff, payroll, invoices, customers, marketing, and the occasional cleaning of an office bathroom. At home, there was parenting, dinner, cleaning, homework, bedtime, laundry, and plans for the next day. When my eyes

could no longer remain open, I'd fall into a restless night's sleep accompanied by a busy mind and grinding teeth.

I figured I had no choice. I had two kids, a husband, a landscape business, a school that wanted parent participation, a co-housing community with obligations, and an overachiever complex.

There was plenty on my plate just being a mother of two with a family business. But what made matters worse was me going above and beyond. I was president of the school foundation, head chef for community meals, the point person for committees, and in my free time, (when was that exactly?) an aspiring athlete training for triathlons. I wanted to be the woman who could do it all and do it well.

**Being busy made me feel important. The more I juggled, the more praise and attention I got from others, fueling my sense of purpose. It fed my ego and gave me the adrenaline to keep going.**

Without being busy I thought my life would look insignificant. I might disappear like a beige house in a sea of endless tract homes, bland and provincial. So I filled every second of every day with a sense of purpose and a mission that never left room for rest. When no one needed me, I scrambled for something or someone to engage with. I'd repaint a bedroom or rework our website to keep from being unproductive.

My busy-ness became an addiction. Another project completed, another shot of adrenaline. I felt good and sh\*t was getting done!

But similar to a person with anorexia who starves herself to the point of hospitalization, I was so focused on getting results that I didn't realize the toll it was taking on me.

I told my concerned parents I was fine, and that it all needed to happen. I rationalized that I had to do it all for the sake

of my family. But underneath it, I was wearing out. My back hurt, my jaw ached, and according to my Ayurvedic practitioner, I'd worn down my adrenal glands, which would eventually lead to other health problems.

**When my mother died, my father took up Vipassana meditation at a Buddhist retreat center in Northern California. For Christmas, he paid for me to attend a three-day silent meditation retreat. I was touched by his gift, but nervous.**

The thought of sitting still for three days scared me. How would I exercise? What if I had to go to the bathroom during a meditation? What if I couldn't do it?

The first two days were the hardest. I did everything in my power to summon my patience, but sometimes I let my mind wander on purpose, counted the minutes until the bell rang, and allowed myself to take walks instead of "walking meditations." I did what any person new to meditation might do: I bent the instructions to fit what I thought were my needs.

But by the third day, something profound happened. I surrendered to the moment, and the stillness felt good. A calm washed over me like the warmth of a bath. What once felt tensely relaxed, and I experienced a deep sense of peace. In the absence of doing, I felt like I was coming home.

That New Year's Eve I made a resolution to meditate every day for one year. Though I knew it was one more thing to add to my to-do list, it felt important. There would be no schedule, no method, no particular length of time, and no particular place. It was just me, sitting in observation of my breath, every day. It needed to be on my terms and without judgment or pressure, or it wouldn't work.

**I noticed my life began to calm down that year. My back pain eased a bit and I craved more quiet. I was quick to notice my feelings and follow my intuition, and my urgency about things**

getting done was beginning to diminish. By the end of the year, I had only missed six days of meditating. What was once a good idea had become a part of my daily routine.

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