



The Powerful Health Benefits of Arts and Crafts

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It was a dark and stormy time in the life of Winston Churchill. At age 40, his career seemed to be sunk. As a result of disastrous orders, he made during WW I, he was demoted from his role in the Admiralty, and became an officer in the Army. His professional profile had declined and his peers were no longer sure of what to make of him. Overwhelmed with regret, anxiety and depression, he turned to an unexpected hobby: painting.

“Painting came to my rescue in a most trying time,” he would later write in his book *Painting as a Pastime*. Over the years, this hobby offered up relaxation, inspiration and respite from the rigors of politics. He loved it and gave himself to the practice as he gave himself to everything, with his all.

Fast forward several decades to the basement of the house I grew up in, where every morning before work as a high-powered management consultant, my Dad would squirrel himself away and do decoupage. What is decoupage? It is the craft of gluing paper images onto objects and then painstakingly adding layers of shellac so that the images and the object become one. A single project could take weeks of layering shellac, with each layer requiring 24 hours to dry before the next layer could be applied. It was exacting process, but it was also meditative, which allowed my Dad to start his work day from a quiet, stress-free place.

What can we learn from Churchill and my Dad that can our help our lives today? Simple. That an art or craft hobby can offer a sense of inner balance - a refuge in our increasingly speedy and complex world.

Doing arts and crafts has a multitude of benefits to our wellbeing. Everything from knitting to ceramics to woodwork and more offer us a chance to soften into activities that alleviate stress, enhance manual dexterity and improve hand eye coordination. Perhaps most importantly, arts and crafts are relaxing and fun. They offer a great balance of skill and challenge, where the sense of personal reward is quick to arrive and deeply satisfying when it comes.

The process of immersing yourself in an art or craft project allows you to forget the rest of your daily troubles and focus on the simple task at hand. This can create a gentle, meditative state where stress levels naturally fall, the breath deepens and a renewed sense of mental clarity can emerge.

Then, delightfully, when seeing the finished product of your hours of dedication, it is natural to feel a surge of pride and wellbeing that boosts self-confidence and can invite a newfound sense of courage. Creative endeavors have the ability to instill a sense of achievement in the creator, which naturally promotes happiness.

Perhaps the sweetest way we benefit from arts and crafts is the way we feel when we fall in love with creating. Watching that scarf for our grandchild emerge, witnessing the development of a clay bowl appearing on a potter's wheel, knowing that the bowl will soon be a vessel for our favorite food. Creative endeavors are an antidote to our modern tendency to stare at screens, consuming the creativity of others while expecting some sense of immediate gratification. The slow unfolding of a craft project invites us to rethink our relationship to time and productivity, to slow down, to wait and to cherish. It is an empowering, life affirming activity. As my great grandmother Nellie Morey said, "If you work with your mind during the day, work with your hands at night." She was right!

Eventually, Churchill painted over 550 paintings and credited the pastime with not only relieving stress but aiding his visual ability and boosting his memory. My Dad continued to decoupage throughout his business career and many years later, I still have a beautiful box he made for me.

