Why Having Too Much Free Time Can be as Bad for You as Having Too Little

October 29, 2021

Have you ever had one of those days — that turned into weeks — when you had approximately 645 things to do and not a single minute for leisure time?

Like many of us, Cassie Mogilner Holmes sometimes feels as if she lives in that state. She also — and this will probably sound familiar — has entertained the idea of trading all those obligations for a desert island.

Instead, Holmes, a professor of marketing and behavioral decision-making at UCLA's Anderson School of Management, decided to research whether extra free time would actually make her happier. It turns out that reclining alone on a beach all day might not be as ideal as it sounds. "To that initial question, 'Shall we quit everything and go live on a desert island?' The answer is no," Holmes says. "We would not be any happier."

According to study results published earlier this month in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, an individual's well-being increases in correlation with their free time — but only to a certain point. Although having too little free time isn't healthy, having too much also diminishes well-being.

…