

27

ways to spend a profitable lunch hour

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Even for the most pathologically optimistic entrepreneur, it isn't easy to stay positive right now. However, your peers are finding inspiration in the most unlikely places.

1 Channel Churchill

If the weight of leadership is resting heavily on your shoulders during this tough time, you're not alone. We've spoken to dozens of entrepreneurs about where, in their moments of leisure, they find the inspiration to keep them on the front foot. Hugh Mason, director of investment firm Pembridge Partners, uses his lunch break to throw open his office windows and recite Britain's wartime leader Winston Churchill.

For those unfamiliar with his rhetoric, here's a rousing excerpt: "Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our

duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour'."

2 Consult the cards

Penny Power, founder of business networking site Ecademy.com, uses Wisdom Cards (by Greg Suart and Diana Cooper) to give her inspiration when making business decisions. "Wisdom Cards help me to maintain a clear focus on the positive outcomes that I want from my day," she says. "They are an excellent tool for people engaged in business and looking to connect with their inner wisdom." It may sound a bit "new age hippie" but these Wisdom Cards have helped Power grow Ecademy to a 70,000-member-strong network.



3 Tame a tiger

Julie Besbrode co-founded creative communications firm Fresh Group in 2004. She recommends swinging by motivational speaker Jim Lawless's website for lunchtime insight.

"Jimlawless.com is both entertaining and motivational. We've used him for a variety of events," she explains. Besbrode swears by his Ten Tips for Taming Tigers: "It is always a hit with delegates and his advice applies to both the business world and life outside of it."

4 Monitor the press

"I always read the business press," says Alastair Storey, founder of catering firm BaxterStorey, which pulls in £275m a year. "We get the *FT* and *Times* delivered every day. Loads of our clients are mentioned. I keep tabs on what's happening to them. Whenever you pick up a paper at the moment, it's always full of dreadful news about the banks and financial services firms. But if we understand the pressures going on in a client's organisation, we can come up with clever new ways to make our service more economical."

5 Read to succeed

Christopher Lomas founded his London-based thinktank and consultancy, Naked Generation, in September 2008. The firm's client list already includes the likes of Unilever and Mouchel. Lomas recommends author Chet Holmes to any entrepreneur with a moment to spare. "*The Ultimate Sales Machine* is a fantastic read," he says. "It outlines all the things that we all know we should be doing but tend to forget: planning out your day before you start; sticking to the rule of doing the three most important things every day; and useful tips like 'never have more

than six direct reports'. Since doing those things, my days have become a million times more effective!"

6 Follow sterling

Graham Whitworth, founder of fire safety firm FireAngel, is glued to the rise and fall of the Great British pound. "It's pretty mundane, but as a manufacturer, it's crucial," he says. "I tend to look at the FX exchange rate website. We mainly trade in US dollars, so I have to follow the financial market trends and keep note of competitive activity and news flow."

7 Plumb the depths of the World Wide Web

"I love personalised recommendation website www.stumbleupon.com," says Jason Stockwood, MD of £175m-turnover dating site Match.com. "It's a great way to spend an hour of your life. You search using your own preferences and the site's learning algorithms. It's a useful way to expose yourself to new ideas on the web."

8 Talk to ordinary people

"Leave the office and go out!" says Chris Arnold, director of London-based Symple. "As a marketing consultant, I see so many of my peers forget what real people are. They only see them through

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research groups or as a number: age, size, income, postcode. Talk to ordinary people. Chat about what was on TV last night, the economy, politics, Victoria Beckham - anything they want to talk about! Listen. Listen very hard. You have to get back to the street if you want to be a successful business because that's where your customer is."

9 Mine others' creativity

"Working in the creative industries, it's important to find inspiration from wherever you can," says Daniel O'Roarke, founder of £2.5m-turnover animation studio Not to Scale. "Hectic schedules mean less time for museum visits, but a quick nose about on fffound.com usually fills me with renewed vigour and creative purpose." O'Roarke's firm came up with the iconic Honda and Mars Planets ads.

10 Go wild

"Running a business can be very stressful at times," says Adam Stafford, managing director of Worthing-based web wizards Fresh Egg. "To unwind after work, I like to stalk and photograph wild deer. I keep a diary of my antics along with pictures I've taken online at www.mydeerdiary.co.uk. During my lunch break, I like to relax by updating my website with any new pictures and diary entries. It reminds me of being outdoors and closer to nature, and keeps me calm when dealing with stressful business situations."

11 Keep cool

Nicky Kinnaird, founder of cult make-up emporium Space NK, recommends Thecoolhunter.net for sniffing out zeitgeist products, events and companies. "From cool shoes to the latest must-have gadget, it's all covered. I find it



“ Chris Lomas takes **inspiration** from the **Good Book**. His favourite verse is Colossians 3:23-24 ”

valuable and fascinating.” Kinnaid has built a £40m-turnover retail empire with 58 stores worldwide. What she doesn't know about “cool” isn't worth knowing.

12 Watch your rivals

“I check my competitors' websites whenever I have a spare moment,” says Robyn Jones of £75m-turnover Charlton House Catering, based in Reading. “If they are covering hot topics, then I'll make sure we're covering them, too. I also like to see how the sites are visually arranged and tweak ours to make it as user-friendly as possible.”

13 Boost your resolve

Kate Gover has just launched Bristol-based Lahloo, a specialist tea company. “I hardly have any time to spare as I hand-pack all the teas as well as everything else that comes with being a small company!” she says. “I often feel completely alone

in what I'm trying to do.” To get an outside perspective, Gover uses Affirmation cards (published by Affirmations Australia Pty). “Each day I turn over a new card. Yesterday's was: ‘Love the challenge’. Today's is: ‘The difference between try and triumph is just a little umph!’ (Marvin Phillips). I love them and they often give me the little push I need.”

14 Imbibe the Bible

Naked Generation's Lomas takes inspiration from the Good Book on his lunch hour. “I'm a Christian,” he says. “My favourite Bible verse, one that I always keep at the back of my head, is from Colossians 3: 23-24: ‘Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.’ I really believe that. It helps me to keep a high sense of

integrity around everything I do for my clients.”

15 Be a Karate Kid

“I do Shaolin Kung Fu,” says Chandresh Pala, who founded specialist software firm Cohezia in 1999. The company currently boasts offices in the UK, the US and India and employs 50 staff. “Contrary to what most people believe, this is an ancient and holistic art, not a fighting sport,” he explains. “It keeps me focused and reduces work tensions. That's very important in this climate.”

16 Learn to fail

“Steve McDermott's *How to be a Complete and Utter Failure in Work, Life and Everything* has a humorous approach to achieving success both personally and professionally,” says Fresh Group director Besbrode, who leafs through the book when she has a minute spare. “Success doesn't have to be a measure of how much you earn or what possessions you have. It's also what degree of happiness and satisfaction you take from it.”

17 Know your enemy

“Monitor what people are saying about you and your company online,” says Will Critchlow, founder of London-based internet marketing firm Distilled. “In our connected world, it's becoming increasingly important to know what is being said about you online. News spreads fast!”

18 Keep your eye on the prize

Stefan Wissenbach, CEO and founder of wealth management specialists The Wissenbach Group, says: “I use my lunch break to remind myself of the big picture. I carry around a ‘pocket coach’, a small book that lists crucial information,

such as my goals for the quarter, how to get there, how those objectives link into my three and five-year plan, and my lifetime goals. I might just flick through quickly, but it really helps business owners to force themselves out of the minutiae of everyday operations and ensure they have one eye on the big plan."

19 Branch out

If you fancy doing something fun and virtuous with your free time, go to www.ecotonoha.com and nurture a virtual tree. For every branch you grow, NEC contributes to projects fighting global warming. "It's impossible to describe this site and is best visited," says Space NK's Kinnaird. "Suffice to say that when you 'add a branch' you will have the satisfaction of knowing you are making a contribution, no matter how small it may seem."

20 Mix business and pleasure

Chirag Shah, co-founder of London-based supercar leasing firm ecurie25, reckons his Chinese MD has lunch times cracked: "Me, I visit the gym or the spa. I may take a client out for lunch. But my MD in China combines the two. He takes his clients to the spa for a massage at lunchtime. And I thought the best deals were done on the golf course!"

21 Know your Myspace from your Helium

Pembridge Partners' Mason finds Charlene Li's book *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies* an extremely useful resource. The book dissects the so-called Web 2.0 evolution, breaking down what the explosion of social media means for your business. A must-read for anyone trading online.

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22 The Hashemis' story

Lahloo founder Gover recommends *Anyone Can Do It: Building Coffee Republic from Our Kitchen Table*. 57 *Real-life Laws on Entrepreneurship*. "It's the book written by the brother and sister duo behind Coffee Republic, Sahar and Bobby Hashemi," she says. "The book is about how they started with an idea and the trials and tribulations of seeing it come together. It helps you to realise that you're not the only mad person trying to do something that's never been done before, however big or small."

23 Visit RealBusiness.co.uk

Of course we're biased, but Declan Reddington, founder of media agency AdConnection, agrees. "It's the best business website on the world wide web!" he says. "Especially the jokes on a Friday!"

24 Don't be a twit, use Twitter

Critchlow's London-based firm employs six people. In order to keep abreast of what's going on in the virtual world, he encourages staff to Twitter on their lunch break. "My profile is www.twitter.com/

[willcritchlow](http://www.twitter.com/willcritchlow)," says the Distilled founder. "I connect with colleagues, talk rubbish and share tips and ideas. It sometimes feels like time-wasting, but we have built real relationships and won business through it!"

25 Multi-task

Check out Will King's lunch during the crunch: "For me, it's all about knowledge: acquisition and dissemination," says the King Of Shaves founder. "After grabbing a black coffee, egg mayo sandwich in hand, I update my twin blogs at shave.com/blogs and brandroyalty.com and respond to comments. Sometimes, I buy domains or check IP (trademarks) at patent.gov.uk. I also check three of our competitors' stock prices, and the state of FTSE/Dow. It's a busy business 'shaving the world!'"

26 Plug in to YouTube

"For a more humorous approach to lunch hours, David Brent delivering his 'motivational' speech is hilarious to watch," says Fresh Group's Besbrode. "Although there's some truth in it, it's a great reminder not to take ourselves too seriously." Watch it here: youtube.com/watch?v=NppcT5lCUA4.

27 Take a lunch hour? Are you kidding?

"If you want the truth, then I'd have to say 'work right through!'" says Syd Nadim, founder of £2.5m-turnover digital marketing agency Clock. "I've not met many entrepreneurs who don't!"

