

This Latin phrase will change the way you manage problems

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All the conveniences of postmodern life don't seem to be relaxing us. Pop songs are increasingly about anxiety and depression. "Burnout" has become the buzzword of 2019. We've all got problems and don't know how to solve them, though there's surely never been a time in history when more advice, self-help books, mindfulness apps, and wellness gurus were so widely available to so many people.

Maybe the proliferation of advice is one of our issues. How do you choose the right solution when there's too much guidance for any one person to make sense of?

Bonnie Smith Whitehouse, an English professor at Belmont University in Tennessee, has a marvelously simple answer. Go back to the classics. She offers this Latin phrase for your consideration: *Solvitur ambulando*. Loosely translated, this means, "It is solved by walking," and by "it" Whitehouse means practically anything.

Whitehouse is not alone in her contention that walking is the key to health, well-being, and creativity. Her new "interactive journal" for mindful walking, *Afoot and Lighthearted*, is a charming and aesthetic ode to the classic constitutional, replete with data on the physical and mental health benefits of this activity (paywall). Interspersed among citations of scientific studies are quotes from the world's great philosophers, writers, artists, scientists, and naturalists about the wonders of ambling, as well as mindfulness exercises, prompts, and blank pages to record thoughts about or after wandering.

In the 19th century, the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote, "Above all, do not lose your desire to walk: Every day I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness; I have walked myself into my best thoughts and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it."

This is the message that Whitehouse is spreading, too. She argues that walking is a way to be more present, ease anxiety, spark creativity, increase productivity, and detox from digital overload (that is, if you don't walk with your face in your phone). "For many years, I have wondered how, in the frantic pace of this age we call our time, I might keep my focus on what nourishes me," the professor writes. "I decided that, like many creative walkers before me, I had to disrupt habits that neither fed or sustained me by radically and literally walking away from them."

Taking a page from Shakespeare—whose character Prospero said in *The Tempest*, "A turn or two I'll walk, to still my beating mind"—Whitehouse adopted constitutionals to soothe her spirit and cultivate attention and wonder. The practice was so effective that she also developed a class, which she has been teaching for six years, on walking, writing, and well-being.

Her journal, a smallish book that wouldn't burden you on an excursion, is based on the lessons she has learned and that she teaches. She calls it "a road map to a present and more creative state of mind." And it's perfect for these distracted times because it's the kind of text you can dip in and out of at random, finding useful insights and inspiring thoughts, a book for the Instagram era that doesn't demand too much extended attention though it promises to help you develop just that.

Of course, you don't really need a journal to learn how to walk mindfully. As Whitehouse herself points out, this mild exercise has been used to improve health and thinking for as long as humans have been writing. Rambling, aimlessly and otherwise, is how we have for millennia cleared our minds, solved problems, found ideas, and exercised our freedom, individually and politically, which is why the writer Rebecca Solnit has advised that "democracy should be exercised regularly, on foot."

The promenade is also a practical act with spiritual ramifications. In *Walking Meditation: Easy Steps to Mindfulness*, by Vietnamese peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh, the Zen Buddhist master explains that walking and paying attention—just noticing your steps and your breath—are acts of enlightenment. He points out that by cultivating a habit of walking attentively, we can start to see the world around us more clearly.

When we're angry or worried or troubled by our thoughts, we tend to focus on what's going wrong. Thich Nhat Hanh contends that mindful walking connects us to all that is working instead, in our minds, bodies, and the environment around us. Each time we do that, he argues, we heal the world and ourselves.

So, the next time you're feeling frustrated, angry, anxious, tired, bored, or annoyed, resist the temptation to go online in search of more advice (though I do love having readers and will certainly miss you). Instead, walk off your woes and stride toward inspiration, like the

18th-century composer Ludwig van Beethoven, whose daily noontime constitutional was integral to his creative process.

It may be the key to unlocking your genius. At the very least, you'll regain peace. In the words of the poet Simon Armitage, "You never come back from a walk feeling worse."