THE THRILL OF PSYCHOMACHIA

Deciding When Not to Stop Can't Stop

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ABSTRACT

This piece will explore the ethics of my use of the digitization of the board game Can't Stop, first to maintain engagement at work and then later to produce a state of psychomachia ("conflict of the soul") in order to work. These two uses combine to showcase examples of playing when one is only supposed to be working, and working when one is only supposed to be playing. It is designed to answer the following question: When the two are combined – the ludological and the non-ludological – in a manner not transparent to others, is this behavior unethical?

INTRODUCTION

The following story should not be taken as fact. It comes from an undocumented, unverifiable memory nearly two decades old. Perhaps best to treat as allegory.

I am in New York City in a long, thin second floor office in Chinatown. The walls are decorated with the boxes of classic tabletop games, nostalgic inspiration for the young indie game designers around me. This is the office of GameLab, founded just a few years earlier by game designers Eric Zimmerman and Peter Seung-Taek Lee, in the years leading up to their release of both

Diner Dash and Gamestar Mechanic. Eric is at the whiteboard, brainstorming early design concepts for what would eventually be launched as Ayiti: The Cost of Life, the first video game I ever produced (a worker-placement game about access to health care and education for a poor rural family in Haiti).

At the time, I worked at Global Kids, a youth development organization. Next to me is my supervisor, Evie, the Deputy Director, who came to youth work from a training in children's theater. Across from us sits Cornelia Brunnner, Deputy Director of the Center for Children and Technology, the organization hired to embed some "stealth assessments" within the game, to learn if player attitudes changed after playing the game.

While Eric was at the board, and all eyes focused on his illustrations, one set was elsewhere, on their device, playing a game. In my memory Cornelia was looking at her iPhone, but that can't be, as Ayiti was launched before Apple's invention. But in any case, Cornelia was playing a mobile game throughout. She may have mentioned she was testing a game under development. The game designers had no problem with this, incorporating her feedback when the topic would shift to Cornelia's area of expertise, but I could tell staff from Global Kids were put off. They wouldn't say anything about it, at least not until we exited, but I could tell by their expressions this behavior was seen as less than professional.

We were supposed to all be working. Why did Cornelia think she could also be playing? Personally, I found it fascinating, like a child seeing an adult getting away with acting in a way they didn't know was allowed.

This was the first time I recall seeing this occur, someone playing when they were at the same time working. A few years later, in 2008, I had the opportunity to do it myself. I was in Madison, Wisconsin at the Games, Learning and Society Conference. The

GLS always offered an amazing arcade, full of fantastic games to be played between sessions. I was supervising one of my students who I had accompanied to present and who, now free, was spending hours effortlessly killing it at Dance Dance Revolution. She was done working. She was just playing.

I, however, was still at work. I finished my round of Guitar Hero, a game I'd just discovered, but now I was late to a session on my schedule. Too late, it turned out; the room was full. Luckily, headsets were available for those wishing to listen remotely. I donned a set and, listening to the lecture, wandered back into the arcade, watching others play Guitar Hero (even though I could not hear). A guitar was offered. At first I declined then, recalling Cornelia, thought: Why not? I removed one side of the headset, allowing the music from the game to fill that side of my ear while the lecture continued in my other.

Strumming to Black Sabbath's "Iron Man" while listening to a panel on games and learning, I was finally doing it: working and playing at the same time.

SETTING THE STAGE

Fast forward to 2020, March. The global pandemic has shut everything down, for at least a few weeks. My small New York City apartment had transformed into both school for my children and an office for my partner and I. Space was tight. My mental bandwidth was even tighter. It was hard — between navigating the logistics and fears of a quarantine — to fully concentrate on my now 100% remote work for the Girl Scouts of the USA. I needed something to help me focus.

I found it, unexpectedly, at Board Game Arena, where I first began to integrate play into my work.

Board Game Arena (BGA) was, to me, a new web-based way to play board games, whenever I wanted, within a worldwide

community of players. Launched as a passion project by two IT professionals in 2010, Grégory Isabelli and Emmanuel Colin, it celebrated its 10 year anniversary in October, 2020 – just months into the pandemic – with some very impressive numbers (BGA, 2022):

- Four million user accounts
- Over 200 board games digitized for play on their web site
- A community representing 300 different countries

Within just four months, membership grew 25% to five million users, the number of online versions of popular tabletop games surpassed 250, and the games were offered in 40 languages. Shortly after they were acquired by the French Asmodee, one of the largest game publishers in the world (Asmodee, 2022).

During their period of explosive pandemic-driven growth, all that mattered to me was that for $4 a month, whenever I wanted, in whatever game I wanted, there was always someone free to play. In my life, the greatest limitations to playing tabletop games were access to people who wanted to play with me, access to the games themselves (many which cost more than an entire year of BGA), and the time to play it.

Their web site frames their users as people who want to "take the time to play." When, exactly, do they imagine us using BGA? They suggest "during your lunch break – or your commute home" or "quietly at home." (BGA, 2022)

BGA did not appear to envision my plan. I no longer had a commute, nor a lunch break. My home WAS my office. I did not plan to take time out to play on BGA. I planned to use it WHILE I was working.

Before I explain why I was playing games on BGA when I was also deeply engaged in keeping millions of Girl Scouts connected

with their troops, I need to first explain in more detail the game that took up my time and attention: Can't Stop.

CAN'T STOP THE GAME

One of the advantages of BGA was its all-you-can-eat access to popular and often pricey games: Azul. Carcassonne. Splendor. Agricola. King of Tokyo. My preference was for games that have shaped our new golden age of tabletop gaming, inspired in part by the uber Catan (formerly Settlers of Catan, named in a recent era when unquestioned colonization still seemed fun). BGA is less like Amazon and more like Netflix, turning the consumption of tabletop games from a store/product experience into a streaming/binge service.

So imagine my surprise when it turned out that the vast majority of my time on the site (69% of my 423 games, as of January 2022) was playing a simple game from Parker Brothers, Can't Stop, first published in 1980. To understand the experience of the game you need to understand its mechanics. A good description comes from a pair of computer scientists at Loyola College in Maryland, James Glenn and Christian Aloi. Together they published in 2009 a paper on their creation of "heuristic strategies for solitaire Can't Stop by generalizing an existing heuristic and using genetic algorithms to optimize the generalized parameters." (Aloi, 2009)
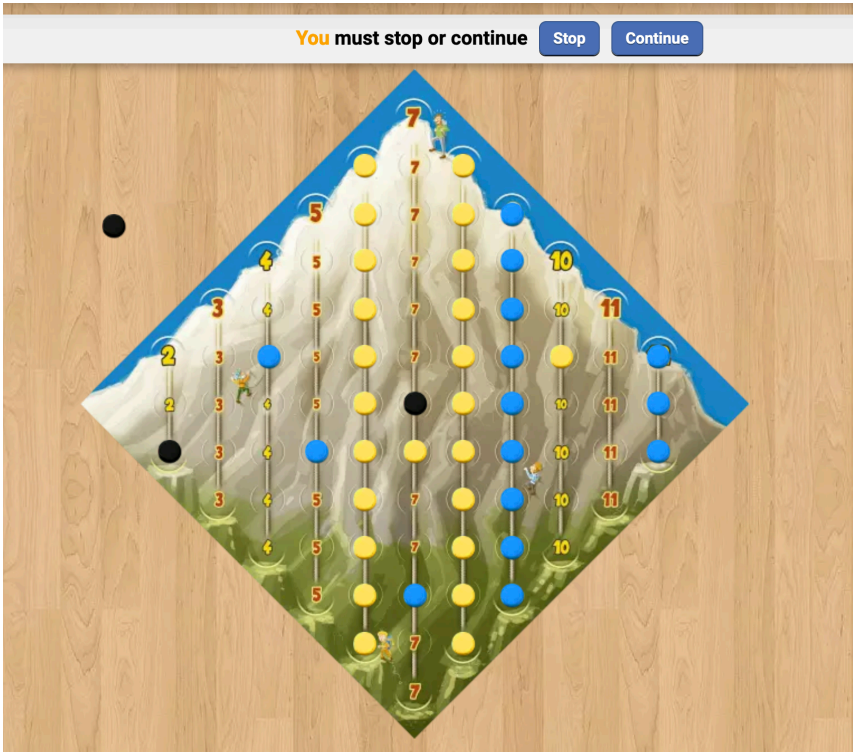
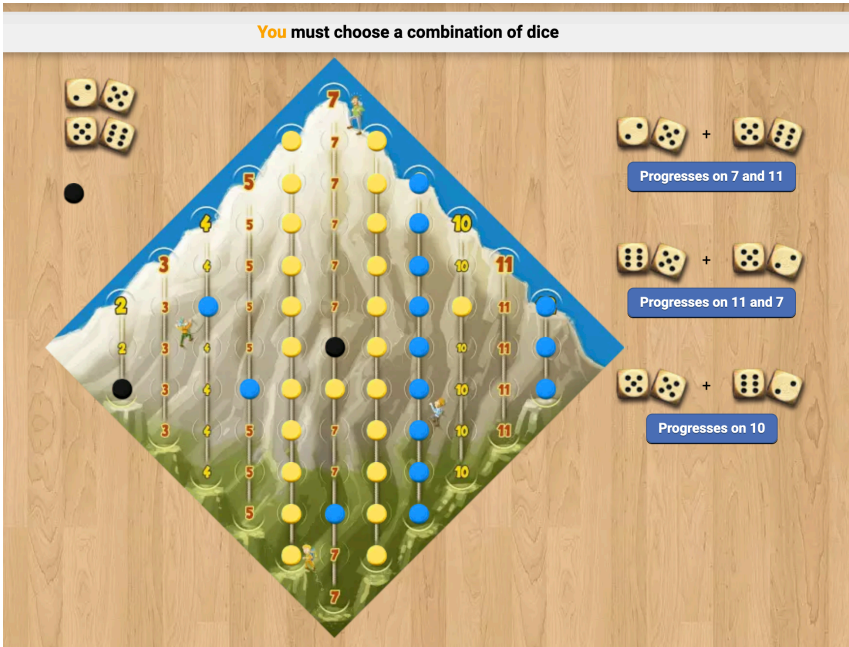*Figure 1. Should the player "Stop" or "Continue"?*

Figure 2. After the player hit the "Continue" button, a lucky role was made.

Within the paper they describe the game as:

> one of a class of games called jeopardy stochastic games (or jeopardy dice games when the stochastic element is supplied by dice) in which each player's turn is a sequence of stochastic events, some of which allow the player to make progress towards a goal, and some of which will end the player's turn immediately. (Aloi, 2009)

On their turn, each player rolls four dice. They can be grouped by that player into any combination of two pairs, using the total of each pair to advance to the top of one of eleven columns. For example, rolling 1, 3, 4, 5 could for example produce 4 and 9 (that is, 1+3 and 4+5), or 5 and 8 (that is, 1+4 and 3+5), or 6 and 7 (that is, 1+5 and 3+4). If the player chooses that last option, 6 and 7, they would advance on both the track labeled 6 and the track labeled 7. At this point, they need to make a decision:

> After each incremental step towards the goal, players can choose to end their turn, in which case the progress made during the turn is banked and cannot be lost on a later turn. Players who press their luck and choose to continue their turns risk being forced to end their turns by an adverse outcome of the stochastic event, in which case they lose any progress made during the turn. (Aloi, 2009)

An adverse outcome is producing numbers through a dice roll which cannot be played. For example, a player cannot advance on a track that has already been completed. Also, once a player on their turn has begun advancing on three separate tracks, they can not advance on any other track. In other words, if a player has advanced on their turn on tracks 2, 6, and 7, if they then fail to role any of those numbers all progress would immediately be lost.

The first player to get to the end of three different tracks immediately wins the game.

CAN'T STOP UNPACKED

Now that the general shape of the mechanics have been explained, it might also be useful to unpack what Glenn and Aloi meant by a "jeopardy stochastic" game.

Let's start with "stochastic". That simply means the game is based on the random occurrence of a predetermined set of events. Patterns will emerge, but can't be predicted. For example, in Can't Stop, two dice totaling 7 will occur much more frequently than combinations that total 2, and yet it is statistically possible for a player to roll four 1s.

Can't Stop leverages stochasticity within the game format termed a "roll and move." Geoff Engelstein, who wrote the comprehensive *Building Blocks of Tabletop Game Design: An Encyclopedia of Mechanisms*, defines this as "games where players

roll dice or spin spinners and move playing pieces in accordance with the roll." This describes most games with a track, from ancient Egyptians playing Senet, movement around a set of Backgammon, players circling a Monopoly board, or children racing to the finish line in Candy Land (with flipped cards instead of dice) or Chutes and Ladders. (Engelstein, G., Shalev, I., 2019). If you played a roll and move on your own, with no competitors, you would simply be recording your progression along the track; if you play with others, now you are in a race. Within a solitaire progression, you have all the time in the world. When it turns into a race, it is all about speed. The faster player wins.

When Glenn and Aloi referred to Can't Stop as a "jeopardy" game, they were not referencing the popular game show. Rather, they meant that the game married the regular occurrence of random events to the push your luck mechanic. Engelstein defined "push your luck" as a mechanic in which "players must decide between settling for existing gains, or risking them all for further rewards". (Engelstein, G., Shalev, I., 2019). In other words, once you make your move, do you decide as a player to lock it in, or risk it all to shoot for a more advanced goal? Now your speed is no longer determined by fate alone (the roll of the die, the draw of the card). Now you, as a player, have agency. You have to make a choice: stay or go?

If all players want to go as far as they can, why would anyone stop? Because to decide to keep going means to risk all progress, and perhaps even to lose the entire game. In a game of Poker, if your hand totals higher than 21, you're out. In Incan Gold, if a danger card appears twice before one exits the treasure-filled cave, you leave empty handed. In a push your luck game, there are always consequences.

Can't Stop iterates the race to the finish concept by breaking the track down from one to eleven. The game I play on BGA is

themed around mountain climbers, turning each column into a mountain peak. The playing pieces represent my climbers, one per mountain. My movement along each track represents my climbers racing to be the first to the top of their peaks. The most common number, 7, has the most climbing locations while the rarest numbers, both 2 and 12, have the least. The theme at first might seem to have little bearing on the game play itself, but in fact the metaphor of mountain peaks provides me with mental scaffolding to make the leap from a unified circular track like in Monopoly to the diffusion of action across eleven. Now I not only have agency in deciding whether or not to stop, but I also get to decide where I want to advance my climbers. Say I roll a 1, 1, 6, and 6; do I want to advance twice up the center 7 peak (1+6 and 1+6), or advance once each on the harder to roll 2 and 12 peaks (1+1 and 6+6)?

Unlike in some push your luck games, in Can't Stop you never lose your progress if you choose to end your turn (unless an opponent is the first to reach that peak). That means there is considerable incentive to hold on to your gains and avoid risk. An advance always feels like an advance. However, if everyone else advances faster, getting further ahead each round, even though I might be technically advancing, what I will feel is that I am falling behind, and the pressure will increase to take risks. If I am only two places away from winning a track, and you are six places below me, I can be more conservative and take less risks; however, if the numbers were reversed then so is the pressure – I will now feel incentivized to take bold risks, as I am likely to lose that track anyway.

As a result, Can't Stop becomes a game of balancing between emotional extremes, between knowing when to relax and taking one's time and when to take bold risks. One can play between those two, inching forward a little each time, but that strategy is not rewarded by the game (and, in any case, how boring!).

PSYCHOMACHIA

This brings us to the experience of playing Can't Stop and the power of psychomachia.

Psychomachia, or conflict of the soul, is the title of a Latin poem from the early fifth century (Holcomb, 2009), a sort of literary Super Smash Bros. of personified virtues and vices — Patience versus Wrath, Humility against Pride — but with considerably more blood and gore (Prudentius, 1743). The battle between Chastity and Lust, for example, ends after Lust thrusts a burning pine knot dipped in sulfur into the eye of Chastity who responds by piercing Lust in her throat with a sword, who proceeds to die as fumes and clots of blood are spat out of the wound.

This conflict survives in contemporary media like television and books through the trope known as the "Good Angel, Bad Angel" (TV Tropes, 2022), with a character struggling to resolve a debate between an angel on one shoulder facing a demon on the other. This is precisely how I feel when I play Can't Stop. There is a tension generated by the two opposing options generated through play of the game, the battling angels on my shoulders vying for my attention, one voice insisting I stop while the other goading me to throw caution to the wind.

These voices remain constant throughout the game, their urgency undiminished by the specific circumstance of each move. One always wants me to stop and consolidate my wins while the other always wants me to gamble for higher gains. What changes, however, is my reading of the strategic topography of the board as it emerges over the game, providing context for interpreting the competing angels. Am I falling behind in the game? If so, the bolder angel will get my attention. Am I ahead by a safe distance? If so, the cautious angel may rule that round.

After I make my decision, to either end my turn or roll the dice, an emotional arc has come to a close. Something fraught has been resolved. If I stop, I take stock of my progress and note the numbers I will quietly wish to roll in my next turn. If instead I don't stop, one of two things occurs: either all progress is lost as the dice fail to roll numbers I can play, dropping my climbers to the same points I found them at the start of the turn, and a pit opens in my chest, just momentarily, filled with despair and regret, before it quickly dissipates; or, hurrah!, the roll is successful, my climbers advance, my boldness rewarded, and I find myself yet again with competing angels on my shoulders yelling their advice in my ears.

This type of play is not for the weak of heart. Each turn is an emotional mini-roller coaster ride, a compressed moment of peak engagement. Whether I win or lose, I can't wait to return.

PLAYING WHILE WORKING

Rachael Hutchinson (Hutchinson, 2021) makes the case that "a person's gameplay style… will necessarily change over time, just as circumstances change in the world and as we change in ourselves…" During 2020, circumstances certainly changed in the world – the arrival of a global pandemic, the loss of my full-time job at the Girl Scouts (Surprise! That's coming up below) – and I changed in response to both. As a result, Rachael continued, "The game text is not a monolithic object but open to… different meaning-making experiences." In this piece I am exploring this idea, looking at one game that, in of itself, did not change during 2020 yet the context in which it was played, and my gameplay style, most certainly did.

I was introduced to Can't Stop during the high stakes, all-hands-on-deck frenzy that described my work in the weeks after the national pandemic shut down. What could we do to support the socially-isolated Girl Scouts, especially during the height of the

cookie season? With the office closed, the frequency of all remote meetings exploded, becoming their own form of pandemic. New rules were required to ensure there was time for staff to take "bio breaks" and stretches.

This was not a result of working remotely. For years the office culture had already integrated more than a quarter of its staff working remotely around the country, with meeting invitations expected to always include both a conference room and a video conference link. What changed, however, was the intensity of the work, and the almost desperate need to stay connected over video. At the same time, my mental bandwidth was so tight, due to the terror of COVID, of being quarantined at home, of the endless stream of ambulances dominating the street traffic on the streets outside. That meant I had little patience for pretending to listen to things that had nothing to do with my work. If meetings were held in person, I'd be doodling away, to keep myself engaged. Multitasking was not unusual during these remote video meetings, but hard to police, especially when cameras were turned off and most people were not needed to contribute most of the time.

I now found a new way to doodle. At home, remotely tele-connecting with my colleagues, I played Can't Stop.

The digital affordances of this analog game – both within the particulars of Can't Stop and the features of the broader BGA ecosystem – made this impossible idea – playing a board game in a work meeting – possible.

First, the attention requirements of Can't Stop are rather limited. Even though this is a live game, my attention is only required during my move. Certainly I can choose to enjoy the excitement of my opponent's play, but as BGA documents the results of each move in a side-bar I can start my turn catching up on what I missed while assessing the current state of the board, in an

instant. Contrast this with, say, Ping Pong. With Ping Pong, you lose if your attention wanders for a moment from the action, your precisely placed swing required every few seconds. With Can't Stop the time between turns can be a minute or more, and nothing is required of me before I return (and, if I am in another web browser tab, there are notifications to signal it's time to turn back). This means the game was well designed for me to focus for a few seconds on my turn, make a play for psychomachia, then focus for minutes at a time on my work requirements.

Second, as a digital game, in which a computer makes all the calculations on my behalf, the game is so much faster. When my dice are rolled the game instantly displays all of my options. No time or bandwidth is required to combine the pairs of dice. This means I can play a game within 5-10 minutes, from start to finish, and spend less mental resources on each turn.

Third, BGA provides a 2-dimensional representation of a 3-dimensional object. That flat representation fits perfectly on my computer screen requiring no physical footprint on my desk. At the same time, it shares the digital footprint with my work space – my web browser, my email, Microsoft Word. This allows me to switch between play and work as seamlessly as I multitask between a Photoshop file and a Twitter notification.

Fourth, BGA affords not just access to games but to a global always-on community of game players. It is very rare I look for a player without finding a taker within a minute or two. Their country of origin is visible on their player stats card – Yemen, Brazil, Thailand, Italy, France. There is no requirement to use the prominently displayed chat box, but most games begin with a round of "Good luck" and "Have fun" and invariably end with all sharing, regardless of who won, "gg" (for "good game"). During the early months of the pandemic, between rounds we shared reports on the impact of COVID on our local communities.

Fifth, Bernie De Koven, in his seminal book The Well-Played Game, describes his ideal encounter, in which two or more people use a game in order to challenge each other to remain engaged in an activity that calls out the best in each person. He told me in an interview in 2014 that the idea was that "even in the most competitive games there are, in the most professional games that you can imagine, there is such a thing that transcends the score of the game: the quality of the game." (Joseph, 2014) In the book Bernie recounts the tale of Bill Russell, the captain of the Boston Celtics, whose team, one night, was playing so brilliantly they were ahead by 30 points. Yet right in the middle he felt, "Wow, I wish those other guys were playing better, because it's just not fun. I know we are playing well, but we are not really playing well together. When we really are playing well, man, we would become like supernatural beings,… at a different level of consciousness, because we are playing so well together." (Mooshme, 2014) I love playing games with my family, but with my kids I sometimes need to make sure they win, or with my partner I need to make sure she is engaged enough to want to return to the board in the future. Not with BGA. On BGA, everyone is there not just to win but to also play well together, by playing their hardest to challenge themselves and each other. BGA is more than just a place to always find a player; it is a place one can go to always play well with others.

Finally, the statistics available provide deep opportunities for self-reflection. A player, I suppose, could theoretically record everything they do in their analog games. BGA, however, seamlessly captures everything you do and then shares it back to the curious, at the level of an individual play session, at the level of all sessions of a particular game, and at the level of your entire BGA footprint. At the time of this writing I can see I have played 423 games on BGA (69% of which were Can't Stop); of the 290 sessions I have played of Can't Stop I have won 53%. Stats like that, however, are trivial. The substance comes from a deeper

dive. Each game has its own stats. Can't Stop, for example, offers data on "Thinking time", "Reflection time standard deviation", and "Number of failed rolls," not just for me averaged across all of my games, but also across all players and, most importantly, all winners.

This means I can use the stats to determine in my meta-game of psychomachia which angel is winning. For example, winners average 34.58 dice rolled per game while the average player rolls only 32.77. The first lesson is clear: winners roll more dice than losers; heading the advice of the bold angel pays off. Where do I fit within those stats? Am I playing too cautiously, rolling less dice than the average, or more boldly, rolling more dice, perhaps even too many? BGA reports that I roll 34.49, nearly the same as the average winner. This not only affirmed my angel shouting "Don't Stop!" it suggested I might listen to him even more.

All of these affordances of BGA combined to make it easy and rewarding for me to play rounds of Can't Stop during lengthy work meetings in which I might contribute occasionally but was otherwise just waiting around. I never considered myself to have stopped working but rather multitasking, or taking microbreaks, which helped me to stay engaged for longer periods of time with remote work practices. I never played games when I was working on my own — writing a report or designing a user experience map — but when I was in remote meetings, forced by circumstance to sit still and perform looking engaged, I often couldn't resist a few rounds of Can't Stop.

All of this raises the question: Was I cheating at work by playing a game? If a supervisor had asked if I was playing games during meetings, and I had denied it, that would have been lying, and clearly unethical. But no one ever asked.

If I thought I was avoiding work, spending my time doing anything other than what I was being paid to do, that would also be unethical. But again, I don't think I was.

Contrast that with the two Los Angeles police officers who were fired after pretending not to hear a radio call about a robbery in progress, instead playing the mobile game Pokémon Go then lying about it to their Sergeant. That was clearly unethical; they avoided work and were not honest about how they spent their time. Certainly, if I were asked to fight crime, Can't Stop would have to go.

But in contrast all work required of me was my attention. Is momentarily splitting my attention taking something from my employer? What if, in fact, taking micro-breaks actually helps me to better focus during meetings, exercising my mind like a quick stretch keeps my body in shape to sit for a long period of time?

I know another who plays games during work meetings. Let's call her, for ease of use, "my wife." When required to log-in to a mandatory call, ones which requires little to no participation, I might see her playing Candy Crush on her phone. When I asked her about it she responded, "It's like a meditation, not a game." In fact, she wondered if upon returning in person to an office, in which it would be looked down upon to pull a Cornelia – playing Candy Crush in the middle of a meeting – she might need to start using a fidget cube. Meditation might be a good way to understand the way I used Can't Stop, not to suggest it helped me to become more present or relaxed but, rather, in how meditation can be a practice for controlling one's attention, to build that mental muscle.

Ultimately, I would argue that is the best way to understand my use of Can't Stop, as a way to control my attention during a time of intense stress. Habits form (both good and bad) when actions are associated with internal triggers (Eyal, 2014). When

my attention lagged during a meeting, and I needed a mental pick-me up, that need triggered my habit of turning to Can't Stop. If after the game I found my attention meter recharged, I would exit BGA; if the need remained, I might launch a new round of game play.

In the end, while I always played for fun, my motivation came from a deeper, more practical place: playing the game at work made me a more effective employee.

WORKING WHILE PLAYING

A few months after being introduced to Can't Stop, I no longer played it during remote work meetings. This was not due to a reduction in stress, nor actions taken to break this habit. Rather, it was because I was no longer invited to these meetings.

As a result of a COVID-related workforce reduction, I found myself, for the first time in over twenty years, without a job. I have been fortunate to have many incredible work opportunities since I entered the workplace in 1995, and even more fortunate to have never experienced a gap between them. Now here I was, in the middle of a global pandemic, without a steady source of income. I was unclear on my next step.

Like many during this period, I swung for the fences. I took the sort of career risk I would never have previously considered: starting my own company. The idea terrified me. I had no idea what was involved nor if I could pull it off. At the same time, I could no longer rely on the needs of an office job to dictate how I would spend each of my working hours. Yes, I was no longer assigned to endless hours of meetings, looking to a game to keep me focused. Instead, I was now assigned to nothing. I had to make intentional decisions about how to spend my time.

I always considered myself as someone who took calculated risks. I was never one to push my luck (see what I did there?).

To cultivate the attitude required to boldly launch a risky new endeavor, I realized at the start of each day I needed some sort of boost. Some people drink coffee to fuel their day. I needed the equivalent for getting gutsy.

I needed a workout regime for those parts of my brain that makes bold decisions so it could respond in the right way. I needed to learn when to trust that crazy angel telling me to keep going and when to ignore the calm angel that wants me to hold back. I realized I could do that through starting my day off with sessions of Can't Stop.

As Can't Stop is a game of balancing extremes — between staying and going, between conservative and aggressive moves — it is a game in which players are invited to repeatedly make decisions about how they want to act in the world. How much do I dare charge for my hourly fee? How aggressively should I reach out to old contacts to advertise my new services? During the early period of my company, starting each day with a directed round of Can't Stop set me up to make those bold moves once the game concluded, to ask for that higher fee, to sell my company just that much harder.

Now I was no longer playing when I was working. Instead, I was using the game as a tool for work. I was no longer motivated because it was fun. Rather, I was more interested in the ways I could instrumentalize it.

Which leads us to the second ethical question: Was it ethical for me to be engaging with the game for its practical effects when presenting myself as just another player? By using it for something outside the ecosystem of the game, was I somehow defacing the magic circle?

To resolve this, I look not at my motivation – which had changed – but the way I played. Was there something different about how I played, between that spring and that fall? And if so did

it undermine the compact made between players? I still opened every game by wishing my opponents well. I played as hard as I could, chatted occasionally, and sent them a hearty "gg" after each one. I never ended games early, nor made them wait unnecessarily between my moves.

If anything, the only difference between these two periods playing the game was that, in the spring, I was playing to win while now, in the fall, I was playing to make bold moves. And as demonstrated earlier, playing boldly is required to win at Can't Stop. So if anything, I was probably a better opponent the second time around.

CONCLUSION

There are clearly times when playing a game while working is unethical (and if it involves Pokémon and you are a police officer, might get you fired). And there are times when working when you are supposed to be playing can corrupt a magic circle. Yet if one is honest about one's motivations and actions, with one's self and those around them, there need not be any inherent conflict in mixing the ludological and the non-ludological. Lines often held up to separate the two might be more permeable than we think.

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