

Breaking Yourself Out of a Rut

You've eaten the same things for breakfast every day for three years, then taken the same car pool to the same job. Your life is more of the same after work. It's time to break out of your rut.

"If you feel like you're stuck in a routine, you probably are," says Kenneth A. Wallston, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn.

A routine isn't necessarily bad; it can be comforting because it adds structure to your life and it isn't stressful. But Dr. Wallston says dissatisfaction may start to gnaw at you and erode your self-esteem if you believe you want something more in your life.

Recognizing you're in a rut is the first step toward making a change. Taking action is the next step. Making small, easy changes that show quick, positive results is the best way to start. "Add one new thing every day and choose things you like to do or expect to enjoy," Dr. Wallston says.

Taking any of the following small steps can lead to big changes in your life.

Personal development

Reduce the amount of time you spend watching television by an hour a day. Use the extra time for something special, such as reading a book, taking a class, visiting a friend or pursuing a hobby.

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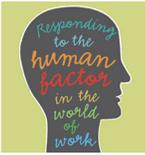


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Claremont EAP distributes this newsletter to provide employees with general behavioral health information. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and family matters.

For confidential help, call: **800-834-3773**
or visit **claremonteap.com**



Initiate a family project, such as planning your next vacation or planting a backyard garden.

Fulfill a fantasy. For example, take tap-dancing lessons, perform at an "open-mike" club or join a neighborhood chess club or baseball team.

Better health

Take a walk. Use your lunch break to explore the neighborhood near your workplace, or use the weekend to visit local parks and scenic areas on foot.

Vary your workout. Add new challenges by making your workout more interesting, not longer or harder. Alternate activities that complement each other, such as swimming and cycling or aerobic dance and strength training.

Explore a new cuisine. Sample local ethnic restaurants. Learn to make low-fat versions of your favorite dishes.

Take a healthful vacation. Attend a sports camp or sign up for a bike tour of a national park.

At leisure

Play tourist in your own town. Check out a guidebook or ask your visitors bureau for information on local tourist attractions, walking tours and events.

Take your camera with you on daily activities. Look for scenes that would make interesting pictures. It will give you a different eye on your world.

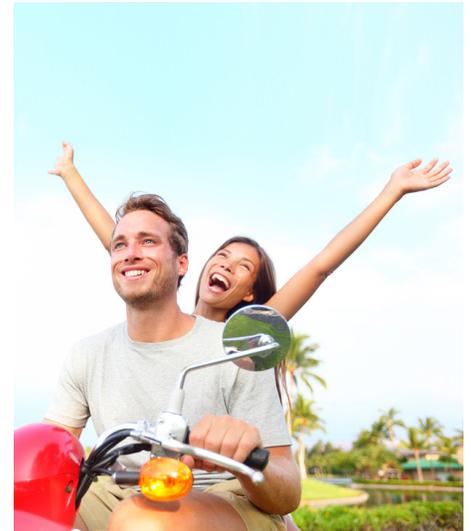
Write a letter to someone you haven't heard from in a while. It might revive a friendship. Writing the letter can also help you clarify your thoughts about your life and work.

Family and community

Ask your children, spouse or friends to suggest their favorite things to do, then join in, enthusiastically.

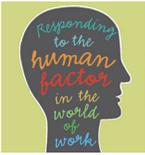
Volunteer at a nearby hospital, library or theater group. Start by committing yourself to a single event or project. If you enjoy the work, you can build a long-term relationship.

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Take the Alcohol Quiz

Nearly 14 million people in the United States -- 1 in every 13 adults -- abuse alcohol or are alcoholic. How much do you know about alcohol use and abuse? Find out by taking this quiz, based on information from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

1. Alcoholism is a disease with four main symptoms.
 True False
2. Children of alcoholics are doomed to repeat their parents' dependence on alcohol.
 True False
3. Once an alcoholic has completed treatment for the disease, he or she is considered cured.
 True False
4. Two types of medication are available to treat alcoholism.
 True False
5. Despite treatment, alcoholics often relapse.
 True False
6. As long as you're not an alcoholic, you are safe from problems associated with it.
 True False
7. Most alcohol abusers are young adults.
 True False
8. Alcoholics must give up drinking entirely to recover from their illness.
 True False
9. A moderate amount of alcohol consumption is two drinks a day for a man and one drink a day for a woman.
 True False
10. As long as a woman limits the amount of alcohol she consumes, she can drink occasionally when she's pregnant.
 True False

THE ANSWERS

1. True. The four symptoms are craving (a strong need to drink), impaired control (inability to limit drinking), physical dependence (withdrawal symptoms when alcohol use is stopped after heavy drinking) and tolerance (the need for increasing amounts of alcohol to feel the effects).

2. False. Alcoholism tends to run in families, but other risk factors such as the influence of friends and stress levels are involved as well. A child of an alcoholic parent will not automatically develop alcoholism. A person with no family history of alcoholism can become alcohol dependent. Knowing that you are at more risk because alcoholism runs in your family means you can take steps to avoid getting into trouble.

3. False. Although alcoholism is a treatable disease, and medication has also become available to help prevent relapse, a cure has not yet been found. This means that even if an alcoholic has been sober for a long time and has regained health, he or she may relapse and must continue to avoid all alcoholic beverages.

4. True. The first are tranquilizers called benzodiazepines, which are used only during the first few days of treatment to help patients safely withdraw from alcohol. A second type of medication, such as naltrexone, is used to help people remain sober. When used together with counseling, this medication lessens the craving for alcohol in many people and helps prevent a return to heavy drinking. Another older medication is disulfiram, which discourages drinking by causing nausea, vomiting and other unpleasant physical reactions when alcohol is used.

5. True. It is important to remember that many people relapse once or several times before achieving long-term sobriety. Relapses do not mean that a person has failed or cannot eventually recover from alcoholism. If a relapse occurs, it is important to try to stop drinking again and to get whatever help is needed to abstain from alcohol.

6. False. Even if you're not an alcoholic, abusing alcohol can have negative results, such failure to meet major work, school or family responsibilities because of drinking; alcohol-related legal trouble; automobile crashes due to drinking; and a variety of alcohol-related medical problems. Under some circumstances, problems can result from even moderate drinking -- for example, when driving, during pregnancy or when taking certain medicines.

7. True. Rates of alcohol problems are highest among young adults ages 18 to 29 and lowest among adults age 65 years and older. Overall, more men than women are alcohol-dependent or experience alcohol-related problems.

8. True. Studies show that nearly all alcoholics who try to merely cut down on drinking are unable to do so indefinitely. Instead, cutting out alcohol (that is, abstaining) is nearly always necessary for successful recovery. If you are not alcoholic but have had alcohol-related problems, you may be able to limit the amount you drink.

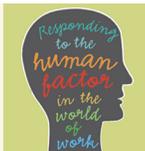
9. True. One drink equals one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

10. False. Drinking during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol syndrome, a birth defect that includes mental retardation, organ abnormalities, hyperactivity and learning and behavioral problems. Moreover, many of these problems last into adulthood. While we don't yet know exactly how much alcohol is required to cause these problems, we do know that they are 100 percent preventable if a woman does not drink at all during pregnancy.

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Get the Most Out of Your Day at the Office

What would your life be like if you could make every day at work a great day?

Julie Alexander, president of Great Days Presentations in Garland, Texas, and author of “Make Life Count! 50 Ways to Great Days,” asks people in her seminars to complete this sentence: “I have a great day at work when...”

“Most people complete this sentence by adding, ‘I have a great day at work when I get things done,’” says Ms. Alexander. “I’ll never forget one woman’s comment. This was a woman who worked for a large hospital as an administrative assistant and had to take directions from three bosses. Instead of complaining, this woman said, ‘I have a great day at work when I choose to have one.’”

If you’ve been feeling like a victim at your job, you may be able to change your approach to work. Even if your situation is difficult, you can make choices to create better days at work. Here are a few.

Start the day before

“A great day at work really starts at the end of the day by clearing off your desk, figuring out what you need to do the next day, then prioritizing those things the best you can, realizing you’re probably going to be interrupted,” says Ms. Alexander.

Focus on your work

“People who have great days are the ones who are able to focus on their work a little better than others. Some people use work time to take care of their personal stuff,” explains Ms. Alexander. “They’re caught up with making personal phone calls or chatting with people about their problems, then they get stressed when they don’t get everything done.”

To help you set aside your personal distractions, write them on a piece of paper or in a journal. When you write out personal problems that are bothering you, it keeps them from swirling around in your head and distracting you from your work.

Give 100 percent

“People who have great days at work are the ones who give 100 percent,” says Ms. Alexander. “Many people do just enough to get by or stay out of trouble. People who give their best tend to get caught up in their work and, therefore, enjoy more of what they’re doing.”

Reward yourself

Your supervisor may not notice your extra efforts all the time, so it’s your responsibility to reward yourself for giving extra effort to your job.

Make a list of 10-minute rewards -- things that are fun for you: taking a walk outside, reading a joke book, listening to music. Then take a short reward break, in the middle of the morning and in the middle of the afternoon. Taking a couple of short breaks during the day also will help lower your stress so you can accomplish more when you get back to work.

Get along

“People who have great days at work are good at getting along with others,” says Ms. Alexander. “They make a sincere effort to get along with their coworkers, supervisors and clients or customers.”

While you may not like all the people you work with, you can show everyone respect and consideration.

“All through the day you’re making choices,” says Ms. Alexander. “The ways in which you do your work, get along with people and view your job are some of the choices you make, and you can choose to make it a great day.”

Krames Staywell

Claremont EAP can help with all of these choices!

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