Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Beat the Monday blahs: bouncing back to work

Susan, a young executive, hates Mondays. In fact, she often jokes about it with co-workers and says, "I'm allergic to Monday." Susan finds her work challenging and enjoys her work, but finds it difficult to get back into gear after the weekends. On occasion, she is aware she is less productive on Mondays.



Mark, a manager who struggles with working smarter instead of harder, often takes work home on weekends. On Sunday evening he starts feeling anxious about the heavy workload he faces on Monday. Needless to say, Mark does not feel like jumping out of bed when that alarm sounds on Monday morning.

Understanding the "Monday Blahs"

What's at issue here is often not the dislike of our jobs. In fact, even people who really like their work often have the "Monday blahs." Why do we have such a lack of enthusiasm on Monday mornings or our first day back after time away from work?

In the book "I'm OK - You're OK," Amy Bjork Harris and Thomas B. Harris, M.D., talk about each of us as having a personality consisting of three parts—Parent, Adult, and Child. When we are at work the Adult takes over, that's when we're being analytical and logical. Most of us put that part of our personalities on hold during our weekends or days away from work. For instance, on Saturdays and Sundays, we tend to be more playful and spontaneous—that's when the Child comes to the fore. When Monday rolls around, the Child who likes to play must take a back seat and it takes a lot of energy to make this transition from the Child to the Adult.

Susan, in our scenario at the beginning of this piece, is the type of person who has difficulty making this transition. There are, of course, other things that contribute to the "Monday blahs."

Many people find Mondays stressful because they have become anxious and exhausted by carrying a lot of worry about work with them on weekends. These are people, like Mark, who constantly think about their work on weekends instead of making some time for relaxation.

Managing the "Monday Blahs"

Understanding some of the common reasons for "Monday Blahs" is one thing. Figuring out what to do about is something else again. Most of us just accept "blue Monday" as a fact of life. In other words, we believe there is nothing or very little we can do about it.

But the truth of the matter is that there are a number of ways that we can exercise more control over Mondays. For instance, we can plan something enjoyable for Mondays to keep the child part of our personality happy—if not on Monday, then later on in the week as something to look forward to. We can try to view Mondays and our work in a more positive way. And we can organize our lives so that the first day back to work gets off to a better start, and the day goes more smoothly.

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Here are some tips worth considering:

- Try your best to complete your work on Friday so that you can start Monday with a relatively clean slate. If you have the type of job that allows you to do this, you'll find that this fresh start makes it easier to look forward to Mondays. If you need to take work home with you, set aside a specific block of time (on the next day if possible) to complete your home work so that you're not distracted by concern about getting at your work.

- List your goals for Monday before you leave work on Friday. This enables you to start work right away and helps to lessen that swamped feeling if you have a lot to do.

- Strive for some sense of organization on weekends. You can do this quite simply by listing your household chores. What's more, you'll probably find that a little organization can mean getting your chores done in two hours instead of five. Try not to overwork yourself on household chores. Some folks run so many errands on their days off that these days feel like regular workdays. Prioritize what needs to be done, what can wait, and what it is that family or others can assist with.

- Set leisure goals for the weekends.

When we don't get much fun out of life, we often see work as the culprit. But more often than not, the problem stems from not making the effort to plan something enjoyable for the weekend. Planning is the key. It allows us to anticipate and get excited about our personal plans, and once enjoyed, we get a sense of accomplishment from having designed our life. If we don't plan, don't anticipate, and coast into weekend activities, the activities tend to lack variety. And we often answer the Big Question of what we did on our days off with the ever common "Not much."

- Free up the night before the big day back to work, and use the night as a time to relax.

- Plan what you will wear to work on Monday or your first day back. You can boost your self-confidence and make your return to work more enjoyable by giving your personal appearance the attention it deserves.

- Get up earlier on Monday morning and have a good breakfast. You might even want to go into work a little earlier on Monday. Remember that a head start will make you feel more in charge of your workday.

- Plan something pleasant for Monday such as meeting with a friend. Or try to schedule a part of your work that you really enjoy for Monday morning.

- Give your co-worker's spirits a lift on Monday. For instance, slip a note on a co-worker's desk complimenting him or her on something you like about working with that person.

- Designate Monday as humor day. Bring some of those amusing cartoons or quotations from the weekend paper and share them with co-workers or post them on the bulletin board.

- Most of us work with at least one person who bounces into work most every day with energy and enthusiasm. For other ideas that really work, spend some time with this person and ask what his or her secrets are on beating the blahs.

When the Blahs last all week

But what if you have a nagging negative attitude toward work that lasts longer than Monday—how can you handle this?

Set goals—daily, weekly, and monthly. Checking goals off your list can provide you with a sense of accomplishment. In fact, most people feel a sense of exhilaration when they cross that last item off the list and realize that a day's work or a special project has been completed. What's more, goal setting puts you in charge of your job. You aren't waiting for your pay check or praise from your boss to provide gratification. If you find your work to be fairly routine, and can't identify daily goals, set personal goals such as reading a particular book over the next week on your way to and from work while you're on the bus.

Deal with unpleasant circumstances at work instead of tolerating them. For instance, if you've had a disagreement with a co-worker, it makes more sense to discuss the problem and try to resolve it instead of just worrying about it.

Try to take a break during the workday—at lunch or at coffee break—where you take this time to recoup.

But what if you really don't like your job and that's the reason you have a lot of days that are blah? For example, you're a person who works with computers and you would rather work with people. In other words, you're wearing shoes that don't fit. Explore other options available within your organization by discussing the matter with your manager or supervisor, or someone in the Personnel or Human Resources Department. It's important to plan and rehearse what you're going to say, so that you can present your ideas effectively.

…Imagine how nice it would be to just enjoy the weekend—and not to dread Monday.