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Get more mileage out of Mondays

Dawn Klingensmith

Rare is the worker who relishes the moment when the alarm clock goes off on Monday morning. In the film "Office Space," cranky, unmotivated employees are playfully accused by an annoyingly perky temp as having "a case of the Mondays" - likening the inaugural day of the workweek to a disease.

But looked at another way, Mondays are a fresh start - an opportunity for employees to lay the groundwork for a successful workweek. Although it's tempting to ease into Mondays by chatting with co-workers or checking friends' Facebook status, workers would be better off hitting the ground running and devising a game plan for the remainder of the week.

Here are six ways to make the most of Mondays - and perhaps even minimize the dread of working that so often spoils Sundays.

Don't fritter away Fridays. Friday afternoons are "often the best time to take inventory of the past week and prioritize the week ahead," says Jim Parker, president, Meridian Strategic Advisors, Indianapolis. "Spend Friday afternoon planning ahead and Monday morning getting ahead."

Come in to a clean desk. "One of my first bosses held a mandatory office cleanup every Friday afternoon," during which workers tidied up their workspaces, says Linda Ann Olson, executive director of communications, Eastern University, St. Davids, Pa. "When you arrive Monday morning to a clean office, with top priorities on your desk in neat folders, it invites you to tackle them," whereas mounds of clutter seem overwhelming and unmanageable.

Swing by the water cooler or coffee machine. "The coffee line is actually a smart place to start the new week. It's savvy," says Pat Nickerson, co-author of "The Time Trap: The Classic Book on Time Management, 4th Edition" (AMACOM, 2009). "In business, you need allies and companions who will share a light moment, clue you in on important gossip, keep you in the loop and help you get forgiveness for small bloopers."

So as not to waste too much time, "Visit with folks only long enough to get the lay of the land,"

Nickerson advises.

In addition, "Top managers always list 'Ability to get along well with others' as a required trait," she adds. "You don't learn those skills if you isolate in front of a screen all day."

Don't get mired in e-mail. If you set priority preferences or filtering systems, then "look only at vital mail that your filter has pulled up for you, by priority topic, priority sender or both," Nickerson says. "As for scanning the general e-rubble that piles up during the weekend, save that for a later 20-minute period when you can rest on your laurels," having accomplished some important tasks, she adds.

Make a strategic to-do list. "Put the activities with the highest priority or the most difficulty at the top of the list, meaning you get to them first. This ensures that the most important tasks get completed first and provides a sense of accomplishment," says Andrew Miller, president, ACM Consulting Inc., Toronto.


While some time-management coaches say tackling a quick and easy task first creates a sense of achievement and builds momentum. Nickerson doesn't subscribe to that theory. "Whenever you handle easy stuff first, you achieve nothing worth crowing about," she says. Worse, you send the message to requesters of mundane or relatively unimportant tasks that they'll receive priority attention, she adds.

However, if you're sharpest later in the day, schedule high-priority tasks for the period when you're most alert and productive, Nickerson advises. "Tackle the high-value things not in your earliest slot, but in the time period when you're at your best" - energetic, have access to the people and resources you need and are least likely to be disturbed or distracted by others, she says. She calls this period the "red zone." Save "smaller-bore tasks" for lower-energy times.

Establish a "Do not disturb" period, perhaps coinciding with your red zone. "I block off specific periods of time to write, work on client deliverables or review documents and I ignore most phone calls and do not check e-mail during that time," Miller says. "This enables me to have maximum productivity and focus on what I'm doing."

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