




Sunny Disposition Shakes Winter Blues

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February 15, 2004

It would seem that not even the thrill of Sam's getting fired from Donald Trump's reality television show "The Apprentice" or a flash of Janet Jackson's breast has the staying power needed to keep us from slipping into that midwinter malaise: cabin fever. You know, that deflated feeling that sets in post-Super Bowl, pre-Easter.

Surely, some of us plan a well-timed week in the Caribbean. But let the rest of us refrain from vacation envy and move on to what we can do at this point to blast out of the workplace blahs.

Experts, of course, tell us to embolden our imaginations. While we may not actually get to recline on the beaches of Costa Rica, we may visualize being there. A less than poor substitute, most of us might think.

But listen, first, to what Shirley Frazier has to say about the "winter beach weekend retreats" she and her husband take in their own living room to stave off sluggishness and lack of motivation during the week. They rent movies, move the coffee table aside, spread out a blanket and set up their beach chairs.

"We have everything but an umbrella," says Frazier, president and founder of GiftBasketBusiness.com in Manhattan. Well, except for the cocktail-size umbrellas she puts in their raspberry fizz drinks. "It's like the beach - only without being there."

And, yes, she says, even a faux weekend at the beach can go a long way to getting those energy engines humming.

It all boils down to a choice, says Annemarie Segaric, a life and business coach in Manhattan. We can succumb to the drabness of winter and wallow, wallow, wallow - or do what Frazier does and look for small things to spice up life. "Practice the little things that give you pleasure and you can learn to change your mood," Segaric tells her clients. Compare this to recharging a battery. In the summer you get juiced up naturally by solar power. But now, if you're running on low, you "have to charge up little by little."

Change your routine and "create a little excitement, a diversion from the weather," says Richard Chaifetz, chief executive of ComPsych, a Chicago-based employee assistance and work/life services firm. That might range from simply changing your route to work to checking for a good deal on a long weekend in Florida.

Just steer clear of what many of us dive for when we're blue - recreational sugar. You may get a nice high from those chocolate-covered caramels, he says, but that only leads to an energy crash.

Following are a few ideas to help boot yourself back up:

Bring in cut flowers for your desk at work, replace that black umbrella with one that's yellow, change your screen saver, listen to music that jazzes you up, put out photos from sunnier days, says Segaric. And Frazier suggests trying different flavored teas - raspberry, tangerine, orange - anything fruity and summery.

Find something to look forward to - maybe it's hopping online to research your summer vacation. Or planning a "Winter Survivor" lunch or dinner with your workplace cronies. Or perhaps it's just digging into your summer clothes and reminding yourself that in a few short months you will be able to put on that aqua T-shirt you bought at that end-of-summer sale.

And, certainly the most surefire way to get your mind off your own discomfort is to lend a helping hand to someone else. Who do you know who is struggling with more than a little touch of lethargy?

But one thing that Chaifetz warns against is assuming your blues are just the blues. If you're having trouble functioning, can't get out of

bed in the morning, you may actually be slipping into depression. So that's the time to call on your employee assistance program or other professionals.

Whatever the issue, he says, it's important to remember that "we are in control of our destiny."

Sparking Your Interest

If you care to cast off that blanket of midwinter boredom, take a look at the volunteer opportunities at www.idealists.com. There you'll find the chance to mentor young people, help immigrants improve their speaking and writing skills, serve as the assistant producer of a theater festival planned for this summer. At the very least, you can read about people who are doing good around the world, learn about nonprofit job fairs and take part in online discussions.

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