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EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER



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DEER OAKS EAP PRESENTS:

May On-Demand Seminar *Sleep Essentials*

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Start Your Day With Intention

Do you ever look back on your day and wonder what went wrong, how it got out of your control? Do you ever get the feeling that you're drifting through the day, blown in different directions by endless surprises and other people's priorities?

Starting your day with intention is a way to regain a sense of control by focusing yourself on what's important to you. You'll still face distractions and unexpected demands—a crying baby, a needy customer, an overstressed coworker—but keeping an intention in mind can help you get through the day with forward progress and a sense that you're being true to yourself.

What does it mean to start your day with intention?

Intentions are different from task goals. An intention is something you want to be, not something you want to achieve.

An intention is an objective that's aligned with your values. It might include something you want to get done, but as a step toward something meaningful and personal to you. An intention is connected to a feeling of being a better person. It's a commitment to yourself.

To start your day with intention is to take a few minutes at the start of each day, before you get swept up in the daily routine, to think about one objective you want to focus on. Your intention might include to be present as a parent or partner, be open to new ideas at work, stay calm under pressure, or nourish your creativity. The possibilities are endless. The important thing is that your intention should support your values and who you want to be.

Examples of Daily Intentions

Today, I will do the following:

- Help someone else.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Be kind.
- Give my full attention to an important work effort.
- Learn a new skill.
- Be the best parent I can be.
- Make progress in getting out of debt.
- Keep an open mind, and seek out new ideas.

The intention you choose might have to do with an important personal goal, such as a healthy life change or an effort to deal with difficult emotions. It might be in support of improving relationships or achieving a key ambition. Whatever intention you choose, treat it as a gentle reminder, not a rigid rule.



Tips for Starting Your Day with Intention

A good time to set your intention is when you are lying in bed, in the calm time after sleep before you get up and launch into your day. If you cut things close in the morning, you might set your alarm for a few minutes before you need to get up in order to have a few calm minutes in bed. Or you might link contemplation of your intention to another part of your morning routine, choosing it while you're in the shower or sipping your coffee, after you brush your teeth, or during a five-minute meditation.

To strengthen your commitment to your intention, think about how you will feel when you follow through on it and how you will look back on the day. Visualize what it would look like to act according to your intention. If it's a meaningful intention, connected to your values, the anticipation of acting on your intention should make you feel good about yourself.

To fix your intention in your mind, you might try these ideas:

- Say it out loud.
- Write it as a note to yourself—on your phone, on a slip of paper in your wallet, or on a sticky note to attach to your computer.
- Add it to your daily calendar.
- Enter it in your journal, if you keep one.
- Share your intention with a close friend in a mutually reinforcing arrangement.

With your intention in mind as you start your day, you'll feel more in control of your life. The day won't seem like a random series of events acting on you. You will be reacting to those events with internal guidance from your intention.

Here are a few other points to keep in mind as you practice starting your day with intention:

- You will still face distractions. Some days, you may have so many distractions that you won't have a chance to act on your intention. When that happens, accept it and move on. Tomorrow is another day.
- Your intention isn't your only focus for the day. You'll have tasks and responsibilities, many of which will be unrelated to your intention. Your intention acts as a rudder, steering you to your most important priorities while you deal with life in all its complexity.
- You might have a new intention every day or stick with the same one until you've made progress on a key goal.
- At the end of the day, look back and consider how you did. Congratulate yourself on your progress, and savor the feeling of personal improvement. If you were distracted from your intention, consider how that happened and what you might do differently tomorrow.

Source: Morgan, H. (2021, October). *Start your day with intention* (C. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.



Mental Health Awareness Month May 2022

Mental Health Support Is for Everyone

It's normal to need mental health support at times.

Even people with good mental health can suffer setbacks and need emotional support at times. It's human nature to have emotional ups and downs, and it's healthy to respond to the downs by talking them through with someone who can listen, sympathize, and offer helpful support.

It's unfortunate that some people consider admitting to and seeking help for mental health issues as signs of weakness. They're not. They're signs of strength and resilience. It's perfectly normal to deal with mental health issues, and the best way to work through and get past them is with support.

It's estimated that in any given year, one in every five adults will experience a diagnosable mental health issue. Those range from unhealthy levels of stress and anxiety

to depression, grief, and problems with substance abuse or other addictions. Over the course of a lifetime, most people will experience one or more of those mental health challenges. Why suffer alone and risk getting worse when help is available?

Fortunately, attitudes toward mental health are changing. Prominent figures in sports, entertainment, politics, and other public arenas are helping to normalize mental health challenges by being open about their own emotional issues and showing how appropriate help can make a difference.

If you're concerned about a mental health issue, be strong and seek help. You'll be glad you did.

What kinds of mental health support are available?

Social Support

Social support—through your network of friends and family—is an important element in maintaining good mental health. When you're feeling frustrated or down, talking through your emotions and the situations behind them can be tremendously helpful.

While your social support network can provide an emotional boost and a safety net for the normal twists and turns of life, it may not be all you need when you're dealing with a more serious or complex mental health issue. Depression, anxiety disorders, and addiction typically require professional support.

Counseling

Counseling is the process of talking with a trained mental health professional to collaboratively work through a problem. In this interactive process, called talk therapy, the counselor helps you identify goals and possible solutions, strengthen communication and coping skills, and work toward improved wellbeing in your mental health and relationships.

Professional counselors typically have at least a master's degree in counseling, psychology, social work, or a related field. To be licensed or registered to provide counseling services, they are typically required to meet certain standards and participate in ongoing education. Psychiatrists are medical doctors who provide mental health counseling and can also prescribe medications (which master's-level counselors are not authorized to do).

Counseling can happen in person, by phone, or online by video, depending on your needs. A common counseling arrangement is to meet once a week for 50 minutes. The meetings end when you are satisfied that you can address your problem. That might be after a few sessions in short-term counseling, or after months or even years of sessions in long-term counseling. Even a single meeting or phone call with a counselor can help you resolve a problem.



There are many approaches to counseling, including three main models:

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) focuses on changing negative or counterproductive thought patterns as a way to improve emotional wellbeing. In CBT, you learn skills to cope with problems and form new habits in the present, rather than delving into the sources of those problems and habits in the past.

Psychodynamic therapy involves the examination and resolution of inner conflicts by exploring how behaviors have developed unconsciously from experiences early in life. Psychodynamic therapy is typically a longer-term approach to counseling.

Humanistic or existential therapy emphasizes positive capabilities, creativity, and personal growth rather than focusing on negative behaviors or the past. In humanistic therapy, the counselor helps you reconsider how you perceive yourself and works to build on your strengths and potential.

Depending on your needs and the counselor's approach, different models may be combined to help you resolve your problem. The key is to find a counselor or therapist you trust and whose approach works for you.

Medication

For some mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and psychosis, medications can be a helpful supplement to counseling. A psychiatrist or another medical doctor can prescribe medication.

How to Get Mental Health Support

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can provide short-term counseling to help you resolve a mental health problem and can refer you to a qualified therapist for longer-term support. Your doctor can also refer you to a qualified therapist for counseling support and can discuss medication options with you.

Source: Morgan, H. (2021, August 25). Mental health support is for everyone (B. Schuette & C. Meeker, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

Hobbies Can Improve Your Life

With busy lives and demanding jobs, many people view hobbies as frivolous relics of the past—activities for children, retirees, or other people who have extra free time. That’s a mistake. It’s actually the busiest people who have the most to gain from engaging in a hobby.

Hobbies and leisure activities that engage your concentration are good for your health, mind, moods, and relationships. When they draw on or grow into a personal passion, they can add meaning and purpose to your life. By pulling your thoughts and your body out of work pressures and daily worries, they can provide a space to recharge your energy and renew your focus.

What is a hobby?

Part of the bad rap given to hobbies these days might be a problem with the name. Think “hobby,” and you might have images of ham radio, string collecting, or other quaint activities of your parents’ or grandparents’ generation. Think instead of a leisure activity that engages your energy and enthusiasm, and you get closer to a hobby’s real value. A hobby is a leisure activity (stress on “activity”) that you do because you enjoy and are interested in it. It’s something you do because you want to. It’s also different from pure leisure in that it gets you off the couch, gets you thinking, and challenges you to gain new skills.

Your hobby might be gardening, woodworking, learning about your family history, reading, cycling, exploring nature, drawing, origami, glassblowing, cooking, rock climbing, knitting, playing music, restoring old cars, birding, or any other activity that pulls you out of your work mind and that brings you satisfaction and joy.

How Having a Hobby Can Be Good for You

Hobbies take you out of your everyday routine—with its pressures to meet the demands of other people—and allow you to spend time on activities you yourself enjoy and are passionate about.

Engaging in a hobby can do the following:

- *Give you permission to take a break and do something you enjoy.* It’s like scheduling “me” time in your calendar. When you engage in a hobby regularly, you make it a habit. Instead of feeling guilty that you’re not working, it becomes part of your routine, something you plan your work and other responsibilities around.

- *Provide a pleasurable break from daily pressures.* A hobby can keep you from burning out in your job. It can help you carve out moments of personal time in a busy home life.
- *Reduce stress.* Engaging in an activity you enjoy can be far more effective in pushing worrisome thoughts out of your mind than a passive activity like watching TV. Immersing yourself in a hobby can help you break the rumination cycle of rethinking the events of your day.
- *Improve your physical and mental health.* Engaging in enjoyable leisure activities has been found to lower blood pressure, improve perception of overall physical function, and reduce stress and depression.^{1,2} Physical hobbies, like tennis, running, or cycling, can also help you build muscle, improve heart health, and maintain a healthy weight.
- *Help you develop new skills.* When you start a new hobby, you’ll dive into a new body of knowledge and acquire new skills. Some of those new skills may serve you well at work and in other aspects of your life.
- *Boost your confidence.* A good new hobby is challenging at first and stretches your abilities. Over time, as you gain mastery, you’ll also gain new confidence and a boost in self-esteem.
- *Enhance your creativity.* Some hobbies, like drawing, writing short stories, knitting or crocheting, jewelry-making, composing music, and designing in wood, require creativity. The more you engage in these activities, the more you’ll build your creative abilities.
- *Forge new social connections.* Some hobbies, like playing games or music with other people, are naturally social. In engaging in these activities, you make and strengthen social connections. An interest in birding or hiking can lead to new friends with shared interests. Today, even solitary hobbies can lead to social connections by sharing your output, technique, or plans in online communities. A knitter in Canada can see the work of and communicate with other knitters in other countries.



- *Choose a hobby for the enjoyment of it.* Avoid the temptation to seek out a hobby to provide a second source of income. When a hobby becomes a second job, you may be engaging in it for money instead of for pleasure. Your hobby could become a source of stress rather than a relief from it. Be wary, too, of a hobby that appeals to you mostly because it will teach you skills that are useful in your work. Unless it's fun for you, that's more like job-skills training than an absorbing leisure activity.

The idea of taking up a hobby for pleasure, diversion, and stress relief can feel at odds with an always-on and always-productive culture. But give it a try. There's little risk and huge potential for improving your life.

References

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Source: Morgan, H. (2021, November). *Hobbies can improve your life* (Z. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

Keys to Choosing a Beneficial Hobby

- *Choose a hobby that engages your mind.* The benefits of hobbies come from their ability to engage you and remove you from the swirl of everyday concerns. When considering new hobbies, try out activities that challenge you, make you think, and require that you learn new skills. The ideal hobby is one that leads you to experience flow—a state of mind in which you are fully absorbed in what you are doing and can lose track of time.