

The background of the entire page is a photograph of an office with cubicles. Two solid teal horizontal bars are positioned above and below the main title text.

21 DAYS TO *peace* AT WORK

Lea McLeod, M.A.

21 Days to Peace at Work

Job got you down?
Manager driving you crazy?
Impossible to leave work on time?

I'm so excited you want to take positive charge of your work life.

These daily bits of wisdom keep you engaged and inspired at work. They focus on specific actions you can take to make +Positive Shifts (and lower the misery index) in your workday.

Each day, take 5 minutes and read just one strategy. Then, throughout the day, use what you read. I guarantee that by the end of the 21 days you will feel more peaceful and in control of your job.

The **21 Days to Peace at Work** e-book is awesome when you need a small shift.

Cheers,



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[Day 1] It's Monday! What a glorious day!

Monday is the key day of the week.
- - Gaelic proverb

Let's start this series with homage to Monday!

Monday is universally derided as the most undesirable day of the week. Poor Monday. But Monday offers huge opportunities. It's a day when you can draw the road map for the rest of the week.

Monday (or whatever day begins your workweek) brings a clean slate, a fresh start and endless possibilities. For many, Monday is the day you chart the course for all the things you wish to accomplish in the next 5 days.

When you dread Monday and complain about it, you give energy to the negative edge of Monday. Instead, focus on the possibilities and outcomes you desire. Feel any new energy?

Here are three steps you can take to love your Monday:

1

Create a clear plan for the week. Map out your key priorities, and the time you'll spend on each one. Next, block out time for each priority on your calendar. It's non-negotiable!

2

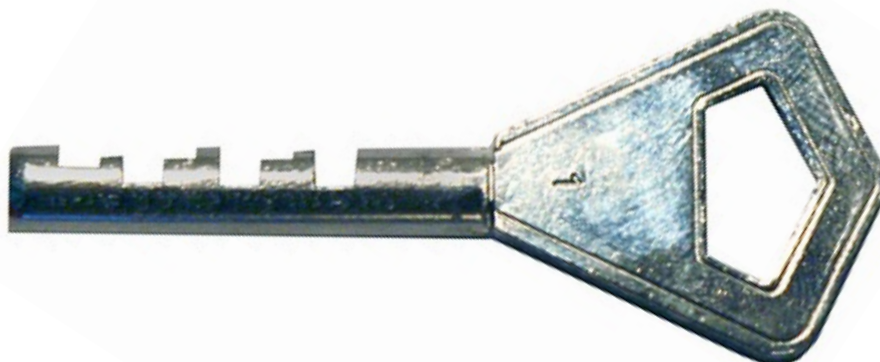
Visualize Friday. Think about how you will feel having these key priorities completed as you leave work on Friday.

3

Block an hour on your Friday calendar. Do that today, and then when Friday comes use this time to reflect, recognize, and record what you accomplished. Then sketch out a plan for the next week.

Shift your thinking to the positive aspects of Monday, then feel the great energy you derive from it.

Day 1: I heart Monday.



[Day 2] Today's a new day. What kind of day will you design?

Design is a plan for arranging elements in such a way as best to accomplish a particular purpose.

- - Charles Eames

Do you go into each day stressed about how you'll get everything done? You can offset some of that stress by designing parts of your day.

Design is a concept that is not limited to fashion, art or buildings. Design is the process of "arranging the elements" in your day to create new, desired outcomes.

Here are three steps you can take to design your day:

1

Design a workday routine. What do you do when you first get to work? Maybe you map out key goals for the day, connect with your manager, or get organized. Decide how you want to begin your workday, and make this part of you routine. This will ease you through the morning transition.

2

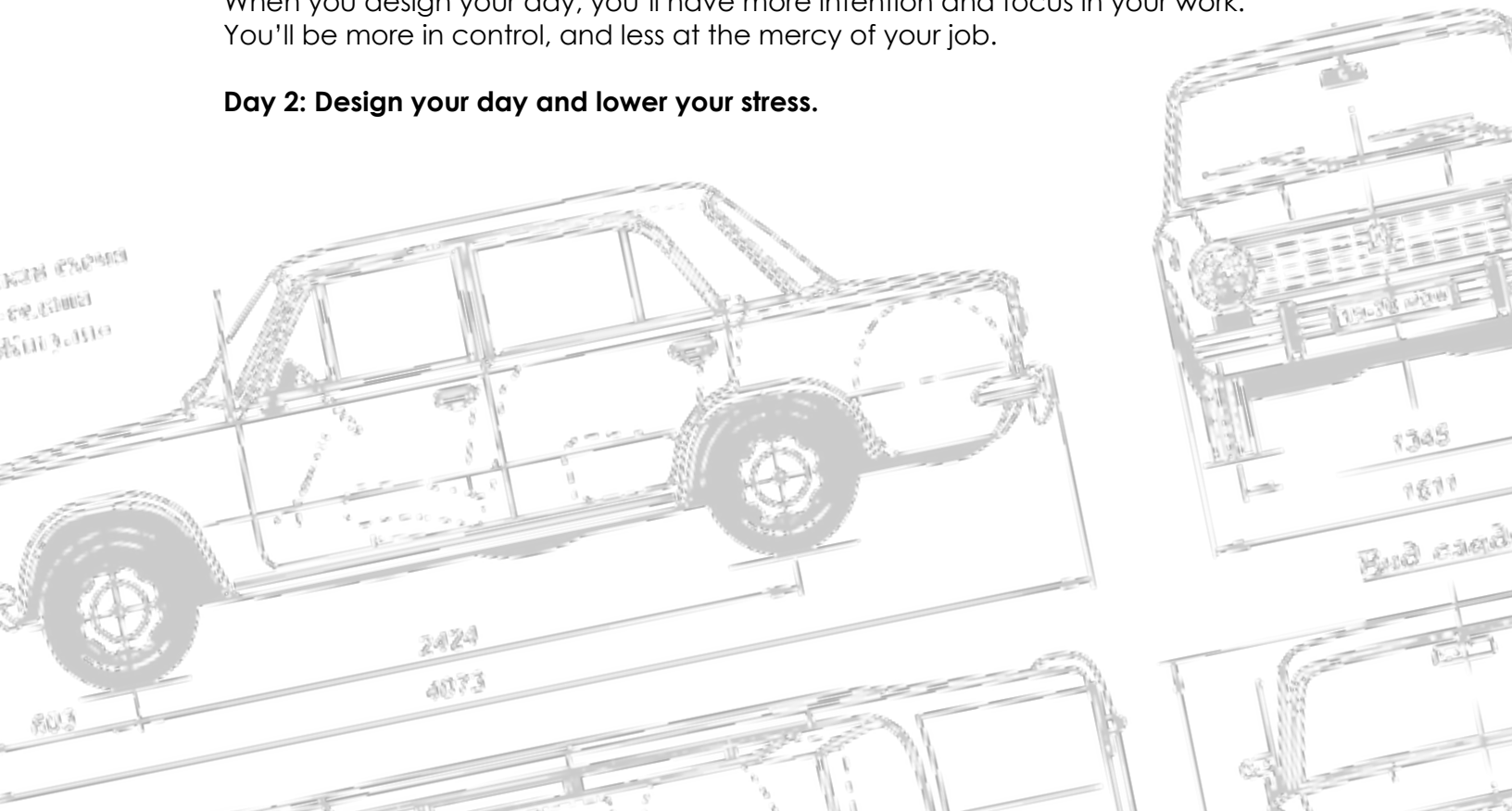
Commit to reaching three key goals for the day. They should tie directly to the key priorities in your work plan and help to keep you focused.

3

Design a workday wrap-up process. These are the closing activities, which prepare for the transition from workday to personal life. Set aside 30 minutes at the end of the day. Organize your workspace. Create a clear plan for what you will do tomorrow. Take a deep breath.

When you design your day, you'll have more intention and focus in your work. You'll be more in control, and less at the mercy of your job.

Day 2: Design your day and lower your stress.



[Day 3] Do other people, places or things make you nuts?

Incredible change happens in your life when you decide to take control of what you do have power over instead of craving control over what you don't.

- - Steve Maraboli

Giving emotional energy to stuff you can't control will make you crazy, frustrated, and exhausted. You've probably heard this a zillion times. Let go of the stuff you can't control, and focus on the things you can.

Focus on that which is completely and totally in your control.

- Your attitude, thoughts, feelings and behavior
- Your response to situations that frustrate you
- The energy, enthusiasm and focus you bring to your work

And here are a few things you can't control, so don't waste your energy trying to manage:

- What other people do, think, or say
- How other people respond to situations
- How seriously others do, or do not take their jobs

When you focus on the things you control, you'll feel more peaceful, be able to accept the rough patches more gracefully, and get out from under the duress of frustration.

Here are **three steps you can take** today that will be completely in your control. Practice them and notice what happens.

1

Smile to yourself and others. I know this sounds silly, but try it and see what it does to your frame of mind. You'll project a positive attitude, to yourself and others!

2

Say positive things no matter what the situation. Challenge yourself to find the upside in challenges, even if it would be easier to fall into negativity and complaining.

3

Offer someone a helping hand. Is someone stressing out? Ask what you can do to help. Offer to get them a coffee. Share an encouraging word with someone who's feeling down.

Then, notice how you feel at the end of the day.

Day 3: Control what you can.



[Day 4] Are you cheating on your work...with other work?

To do two things at once is to do neither.
-- Publilius

Do you have these multi-tasking tendencies?

- You have a ton of browser windows open on your desktop at one time.
- You flit among file folders on your desk without actually completing a task for any of them.
- You find yourself stopping mid-task to check email, IM, Facebook or Twitter.
- You sit on conference calls and do email or other work.
- You finish your day thinking "I was so busy, but can't really identify what I accomplished."

If you answered yes to any of these, you have contracted the multi-tasking virus. Multi-tasking tricks you into thinking you're productive.

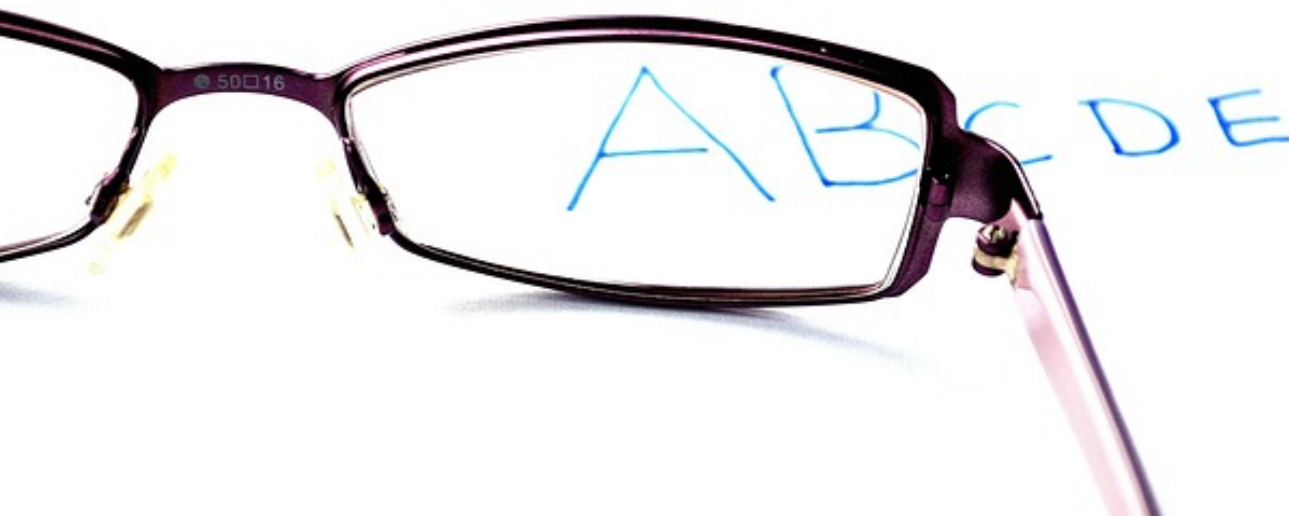
In reality it takes more time and energy to do each task. And, you compromise the quality of your work. If you feel constantly overwhelmed and unfocused, or if you are consistently not completing your work, check your multi-tasking proclivities.

Here are **three steps you can take** today to shift your multi-tasking mindset:

- 1 Focus:** When you're on a phone call, give yourself the luxury of focusing on nothing but the call. (Permission is granted!)
- 2 Single-task:** Commit to single tasking. Limit yourself to one open browser screen or one open email message, and no more. Complete that task before moving on.
- 3 Distraction contraction:** Turn off email, text, IM, social media while you are focused in on important work. (You can do it!)

Try it for one day. Then another. Then another. Notice how you feel at the end of the week.

Day 4: Single-task.



[Day 5] It's Friday! Woot!

Make each day of the week like Friday and your life will take on new enthusiasm.
- - Byron Pulsifer

Who doesn't love Friday?

Well, hopefully you had a good plan mapped out and you got your key priorities accomplished. If all went accordingly, you are looking back on the week and feeling pretty darn good about it!

If not, well, you're getting the hang of it and you get another chance to improve next week.

Friday is more than just the end of the week. This is the day to celebrate and commemorate the accomplishments of the past 5 days! Remember the hour you blocked on today's calendar? Use that for your "Weekly Recall."

Here are **four steps you can take** to implement your Weekly Recall. In your notebook, jot down how you tackled the following items at the end of each week.

- 1 Recognize your accomplishments** of the past week. How well did they align with the outcomes you designed for each day?
- 2 Identify what you did well.** What are the accomplishments or interactions that propelled you forward?
- 3 Identify opportunities to improve next week.** Ok, so there were some bumps. You can identify them and be more conscious of closing those gaps next week.
- 4 Sketch out the flight plan for next week.** Call out the top-3 desired outcomes that align with your priorities.

Feel the positive energy? I Thought so. Now, clean up your work area and go home on time! Make it a great weekend!

Day 5: Take a victory lap on Friday.



[Day 6] Breaking up with procrastination.

Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of an
uncompleted task.

- - William James

Have you ever kept putting something off until it became so big in your imagination it took on a life of its own? Don't you find that creates more stress than you need?

You probably delay for any number of reasons, including:

- Fear you won't do it perfectly.
- Fear you'll fail, or be judged.
- Poor planning and feeling overwhelmed.
- Avoiding uninteresting work.
- Feeling like "it won't matter anyway."

Then you're down to the wire, and hustling to get it done.

When you've waited until the last-minute to do something, there's no time for "going the extra mile." Procrastination keeps your work, and your confidence, ordinary at best. What are you waiting for?

Here are **three steps you can take** to turn your procrastination around.

1

Schedule it: Block time in your calendar to work on something you're putting off. Scheduling makes it real. Make the commitment to getting it done.

2

Focus on it: Work in 20-minute increments without looking up.

3

Phone a friend. Ask a friend or colleague to hold you accountable on something you want to get complete before a deadline, and give them daily updates on your progress. (Then, reciprocate!)

What's the worst thing that can happen? Change this bad habit and see how your stress and anxiety diminish.

Day 6: Breaking up is hard to do, and totally worth it.

[Day 7] Popping the question...will you help me?

Refusing to ask for help when you need it is refusing someone the chance to be helpful.

- - Ric Ocasek

Do you dread asking a co-worker for help? Do you fear appearing weak, unreasonable or incompetent? Do you think asking for help is taboo?

Well, think about the people you have helped along the way. Did you perceive them as incompetent or weak? Or did you view their requests as unreasonable?

A recent survey revealed that 67% of employees learn about their jobs from co-workers and not from their bosses. It's likely that you will need to ask others for help at some point.

Here are **three steps you can take** in your next request for help:

1

Don't start your request for help with an apology. If you start with an apology you'll feel badly about asking; so skip it.

2

State the issue you're working on. Share why it's important in the context of your job. Describe the specific outcome you need and how that person can help you.

3

Tell your colleague what you've already done on your own to help solve the problem. Who doesn't want to help a self-starter?

We all need a little help sometime. A well-designed request for help is totally within your control.

Day 7: Pop the question.



[Day 8] Ok, let's talk about the boss.

An employee's motivation is a direct result of the sum of interactions with his or her manager.
- - Bob Nelson

A big part of your job satisfaction comes from your relationship with your manager.

Hopefully your manager is the source of great joy and motivation. No matter what your boss is like, though, you can identify ways to work productively together.

Here are **three steps you can take** to strengthen your manager interaction:

- 1 Know your boss's goals.** Find out what they are being held accountable for. This directly affects what you need to accomplish for them.
- 2 Schedule regular one-on-one meetings.** Have weekly or monthly one-on-one meetings to share progress, receive feedback, and build your relationship. Create and bring an agenda of the topics you want to cover. Then come prepared to discuss those topics.
- 3 Your job is to make your manager successful.** Let them know you know this. In your next meeting, ask, "What can I do to help you be more successful?"

It's not possible to control your boss, their actions, or their shortcomings. Relieve the stress of having an imperfect manager by managing your part. Learn how to contribute to their success and follow through.

Day 8: Manage your relationship with your manager.



[Day 9] Do you do this 25,000 times per year?

I do not want to waste any time. And if you are not working on important things, you are wasting time.

- - Dean Kamen

If you check your email every 5 minutes that means you'll check it about 24,960 times during a work year. Wow! Think about the habits could you practice - and master - after doing them nearly 25,000 times!

Email can fool you into feeling productive. But often the opposite is true. When you don't leave work feeling productive, anxiety, self-doubt and stress creep in.

Here are **three steps you can take** today, to manage your email more effectively.

1

Develop a schedule for checking email. It can be once per hour, twice per day, at specific times, or whatever works for you. Let others know how and when you'll be checking and responding to email, so they know what to expect from you.

2

Turn off the icon and silence the "ding" that alerts you to every email.

3

If you open it, do something with it. At the designated email check time, and focus on taking an action on every message: delete, archive, file, respond, suspend or forward. We'll talk more about this later in the series.

You'll leave work each day feeling more productive when you don't let email run your day.

Day 9: If you're going to do something 25,000 times, make it something worthwhile!



[Day 10] How to be a best-read (email) author

**My most important piece of advice to all you would-be writers:
when you write, try to leave out all the parts readers skip.
-- Elmore Leonard**

Do you get frustrated when people don't respond to emails you've sent? Then you end up having to chase them down to get what you need?

When you send email you compete for someone's eyeballs with hundreds of other messages in their inbox. You want to get read, and get the response you need.

Here are **five actions you can take** to write emails that make it easy for others to read and respond:

1

Create a compelling subject line. Put the action requirement, response time and topic in the subject line. This helps the reader prioritize. Here are some examples.

- *Action required by Friday 1/15: Public utility bid process*
- *FYI only/no action required: Team meeting update*
- *Response required by Friday: ABC project*

2

Don't bury the lead. Begin the message with "The purpose of this message is..."

3

Use bullets and whitespace in your message design. Eyes need resting places!

4

Complete the message in one screen, no more!

5

Have a clear call to action. Try one of these:

- *I need response from you by XX date.*
- *If I don't hear from you by [XX date] I will [take this action].*
- *Let me know if this is not what you are looking for.*

Keep it simple, audience specific, and action oriented. Your emails will get read, responded to, and you spend less time chasing people down.

Day 10: Don't write emails that suck.



[Day 11] Who's in the audience?

Constantly talking isn't necessarily communicating.
-- Charlie Kaufman

Have you ever given a presentation or had a conversation, and people's eyes glaze over and you know you've lost them?

When you are having a conversation, making a presentation, or writing a report or proposal, how much time do you spend assessing your audience?

Deliver a message specifically tailored to your audience and their needs so that you can achieve the outcomes you desire. Communication is not just about what you're saying, but how (and if) other people are receiving it!

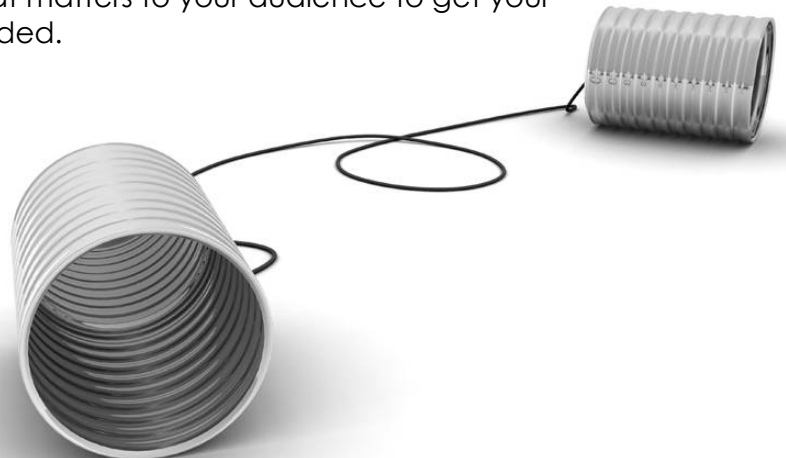
Here are **five questions you can ask** as you develop your message:

- 1 What is the purpose of this communication?**
- 2 Who is my audience?**
- 3 What is important to them?**
- 4 What are their interests, perspectives, and points of view?**
- 5 What questions might they have about this conversation?**

How any message is received depends on how you plan for your audience.

Spend some time thinking about what matters to your audience to get your messages landing the way you intended.

Day 11: Who's listening?



[Day 12] Smite self-sabotage.

All forms of self-defeating behavior are unseen and unconscious, which is why their existence is denied.
-- Vernon Howard

Do you ever feel like your own worst enemy? Self-defeating behavior that comes between your good intentions and your actual performance can really set you back.

That setback takes you further from, rather than closer to, your goals. You let yourself off the hook of accountability. Afterwards you might feel disappointed or that you failed. You become increasingly frustrated.

Why compound your stress because you didn't meet your own expectations? Self-sabotage is your daily choice.

Here **are five things you can do** to help you off the self-sabotage train.

- 1** Know your top priorities for each day and each week.
- 2** Say "no" to things that are not in your top priorities.
- 3** Be well organized.
- 4** Stop procrastinating.
- 5** Stop multi-tasking.

So much of what happens to us in the workplace is within our control. You can eradicate self-sabotage practices!

Day 12: Get out of your own way.

[Day 13] In you we trust.

I'm not upset that you lied to me;
I'm upset that from now on I can't believe you.
- - Friedrich Nietzsche

Are you trust-worthy or do people question your loyalty? Building trust with your manager, your peers, and your clients, is one of the most important missions of your job.

More than telling people "trust me," earning trust requires a demonstration of consistent behavior and character. Over time, you earn the confidence of others.

Proving yourself to be trust-worthy demonstrates your leadership potential in the organization. It surely establishes your sense of self-leadership. And, it allows you to work more quickly and efficiently with others.

Here are **seven things you can do** to demonstrate your trustworthiness with others in your organization.

- 1 Be on time.**
- 2 Honor your deadlines and deliverables.**
- 3 If you can't keep a commitment, let people know beforehand.**
- 4 Avoid gossip.**
- 5 Keep confidences.**
- 6 Own your mistakes, don't blame others.**
- 7 Tell the truth.**

These are relatively simple and effective ideas to up your trust IQ. When you have a strong foundation of trust with others, nearly everything else you need to do becomes easier.

Day 13: Earning trust pays amazing dividends.



[Day 14] Take personal responsibility.

In the long run, we shape our lives, and we shape ourselves.
The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make
are ultimately our own responsibility.
- - Eleanor Roosevelt

Do you ever feel like the circumstances you're in are someone else's fault? If it hadn't been for some knucklehead, your life would be a whole lot better?

Maybe your boss piles on extra work at the last minute, or people on your team don't collaborate and share information the way you would like. Perhaps you're still blaming your parents for your unhappy childhood.

You can't control how others behave. You certainly can't change the past. However, you always have a choice in terms of how you respond to the actions of others. Instead of looking for scapegoats, take personal responsibility for your life, your situation, and your choices.

Here are **three steps you can take** to take ownership of who you are, and how you behave.

- 1 Choose to stop blaming others** for any situation you find yourself in. When you hear these thoughts forming, stop them in their tracks.
- 2 Choose to stop thinking like a victim.** Instead, identify what action you can take to turn an undesirable situation around.
- 3 Own the fact that you alone are responsible** for the choices and actions you take in your life.

Day 14: Focus on what's in YOUR control.



[Day 15] Focus up!

Concentration in its truest, unadulterated form means the ability to focus the mind on one single solitary thing.
-- Komar

Do you start the day with good intentions about all the stuff you're going to get done, and then by noon think, "what happened here?"

It might be because you didn't take advantage of that early part of the day. That's the time when our willpower and focus tend to be strongest. It's before myriad tasks, work interruptions, and other unexpected goings on distract us.

If you're a morning person, your best opportunity for focus and accomplishment is the first couple hours of the workday. If you're a night owl, you might find a moonlight focus more to your liking.

The point is, find out when you are best at continuous, uninterrupted, productive bliss, and go for it.

Here are **three steps you can take** to get uber-productive:

- 1** **Block out three hours at the start of your productive time** to focus on the day's most important outcomes. Put the time on your calendar, so no one else can claim it.
- 2** **Put a "do not disturb" sign** virtually or otherwise.
- 3** **Turn off all your "distraction devices"** (email, cell phones, IM, socials, etc.) and focus on getting your most important work done.

You deserve success. Success comes when you focus on and accomplish your **most important work**. Find the best time of your day and make it work for you!

Day 15: Focus up when your willpower and commitment are on fire.



[Day 16] If you have to eat a frog, don't stare at it too long.

**One painful duty fulfilled makes the next plainer and easier.
-- Helen Keller**

Perhaps you've acquired the bad habit of putting off big, important work. For our purposes, we'll call that work a frog.

Or, you say you'll do that work but then you get distracted with other less important, stuff.

When you want to feel accomplished, **take these three steps** to design a productive day.

- 1** **Plan your daily work** in descending order of important tasks.
- 2** **Tackle your biggest, most important frog early in the day.**
- 3** **When you've consumed the two biggest frogs, give yourself a treat.**

When you get those tough things done, take a breath and do something nice to reward yourself. Coffee? Tea? A walk outside?

Next time you think about stalling, remember that frog and how you felt about yourself afterward.

Day 16: If you have to eat a frog, don't stare at it for too long.



[Day 17] You kiss your mother with that mouth?

Dwelling on the negative simply contributes to its power.
- - Shirley MacLaine

When you're running at full tilt, do you use words like "swamped", "overwhelmed," or "up to my eyeballs," to describe your day?

What you focus on grows.

When you use those negative words you're reinforcing the idea that your work is more in control of you, than you are of it. That's doing yourself, your professional image, and your confidence a huge disservice.

Negative words can draw you in. They can almost be perversely comforting when you give into them.

Here are **three steps you can take** to shift into a more positive mindset.

1

Make a list of the negative words you use at work, and come up with corresponding, positive words. Instead of referring to yourself as "swamped!" use words like focused, productive, or "in the zone."

2

Keep a list of completed work. Pause and reflect on accomplishment. Shift your energy and momentum to those results so you can envision even more.

3

Avoid listening to people whine about their workload. Dump those unproductive conversations and run from them as quickly as possible!

Repetitive, negative speech patterns can seep into your subconscious, and are just plain depressing. Retrain your language to focus on energizing, constructive ideas that will help you take colossal action to get things done.

Day 17: If you say it, it must be true!



[Day 18] Ripping off Band-Aids

If you want to make an easy job seem mighty hard,
just keep putting off doing it.
- - Olin Miller

There are always things in your job, your life, or family life that you just don't want to do.

- You accepted an invitation to an event you really don't want to go to, now you need to retract your RSVP.
- You have to tell someone "no" and it's making you uncomfortable so you put it off.
- You need to have a difficult conversation with your manager, but you can't get up the nerve.

But here's the thing. You always feel so much better when those things are done! It's like a weight lifted off your chest. Letting them hang out there as "pending" gives them more influence and power than they deserve. And it creates more stress.

Here are **three steps you can take** to attack those undesirable elements on your to-do list:

1

Visualize the way you will feel when the action is completed. Focus on the relief you'll feel and how free it will be to have that off your list.

2

Give yourself a deadline, and anticipate what you need to do to prepare. Then "see yourself" doing it.

3

When you're done, write yourself a note documenting how good you feel. Read it next time you've got something in the delay cycle.

Day 18: Just do it already!



[Day 19] Oops, it's inevitable that you'll do it.

It's always helpful to learn from your mistakes because then
your mistakes seem worthwhile.

- - Garry Marshall

Do you ever get anything wrong? Miss a meeting? Drop the ball when others counted on you?

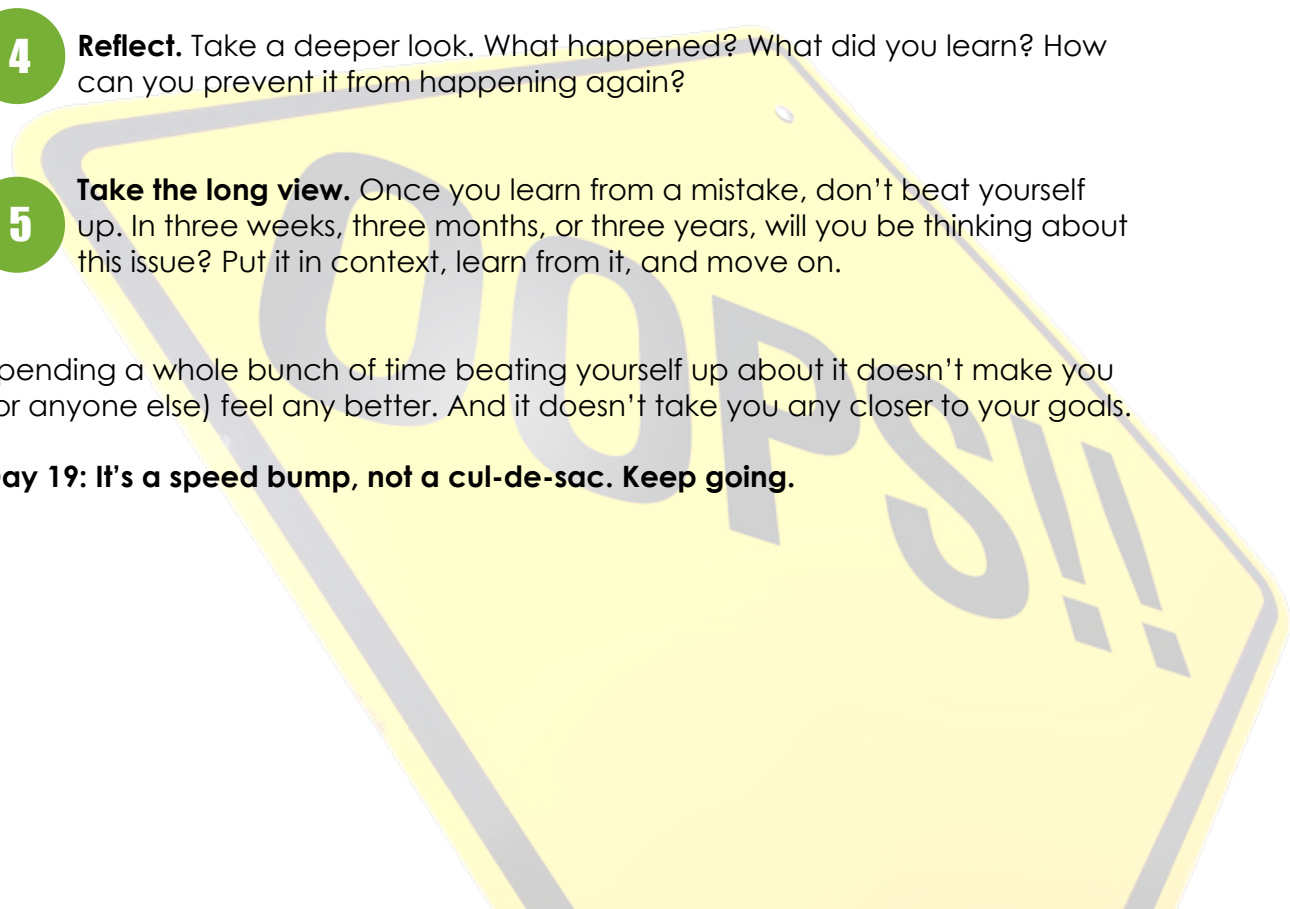
It's inevitable that you will make a mistake at some point during this day, week or month. We ALL make mistakes. It's important to acknowledge and correct them. And just as important is your ability to learn from the event, and move forward.

Here are **five steps you can take** to bounce back from a mistake:

- 1 Own it.** Don't evade the issue or blame others.
- 2 Come clean.** Some errors impact the larger workplace. If yours does, then let your manager or someone who needs to, know.
- 3 Apologize, if necessary.** If you affected someone else, let him you are sorry to have let him down.
- 4 Reflect.** Take a deeper look. What happened? What did you learn? How can you prevent it from happening again?
- 5 Take the long view.** Once you learn from a mistake, don't beat yourself up. In three weeks, three months, or three years, will you be thinking about this issue? Put it in context, learn from it, and move on.

Spending a whole bunch of time beating yourself up about it doesn't make you (or anyone else) feel any better. And it doesn't take you any closer to your goals.

Day 19: It's a speed bump, not a cul-de-sac. Keep going.



[Day 20] Tame the email beast. (Part 1)

The default state of your inbox should probably not be 'keep sitting here until I start weeping'.
-- Merlin Mann

Email is a necessary part of your day. In many cases, it can be the most annoying part. If unfinished, loose ends tug at your conscience, then you need an inbox management strategy.

Here are **five steps you can take** to better manage your incoming email.

1 Designate a time. Check and process email only at designated times of the day. Otherwise, stow the inbox.

2 Set up rules. Don't let Google alerts, newsletters, subscriptions, and professional news clog up your inbox. You can have these messages delivered to a designated file for reading at your leisure.

3 Take an action on EVERY email. If you're going to open it, do something with it or delete it. Don't let read mail pile up in your inbox.

4 Turn off the audible and visual "you have mail" notifications. (Really, do you need a reminder that you get emails?)

5 If you want to receive fewer emails, **send fewer emails!**

Email tricks you into feeling productive when you respond to the little "mail" icon. Our brains get a little squirt of dopamine (happy brain sauce) when we respond. But it's a short-term fix. And it may be distracting you from your desired outcomes.

Day 20: Get your email out of the jungle and on a leash.



[Day 21] Tame the email beast. (Part 2)

Those who make the worst use of their time
are the first to complain of its brevity.
- - Jean de La Bruyère

Email is an "easy" thing to do. Tending to the inbox gives you the feeling of having actually done something. But often it does not take you closer to your daily goals.

Yesterday we discussed setting aside a designated time each to day process email. When it's time, take a specific action on each message. If you're going to open it, do something with it or delete it.

Here are **six steps you can take** when a message reaches your inbox.

- 1 Delete.** Use this button ruthlessly. You'll be amazed how much mail can be deleted.
- 2 Forward** it to someone else for action. Put a "follow up" reminder on this to make sure it's being handled, or put it on a calendar.
- 3 Respond** quickly with a minimal number of words.
- 4 Suspend.** If a response is needed but might take some time and research to create a reply, put a reminder date on it.
- 5 Archive.** If you think you might need it in the future for reference. Use sparingly.
- 6 Do.** If you can do something now and be done with it, do so. Send a doc to someone, give someone a call, or schedule a meeting for the future.

When you keep touching email with no action, you're feeding the procrastination habit. Instead, feed a good, new habit around skills that will make you feel more in control of your email.

Day 21: Your email is not the boss of you.



[Wrap up!] Keep up the good work.

The most important question to ask on the job is not "What am I getting?" but rather "What am I becoming?"

- - Jim Rohn

It's been fun having you along for **21 Days to Peace At Work!** I hope you've gotten inspiration and encouragement along the way!

Keep going, and keep growing.

Cheers!

Lea McLeod



21 Days to Peace at Work
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