



STATE OF NEW JERSEY CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

April
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EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) Newsletter contains useful articles and information for managing various well-being and work-life issues in order to create a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace. EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance.



UPCOMING WEBINAR

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE TO BETTER COPE WITH STRESS

About the Webinar:

This practical presentation discusses strategies for managing the way we look at and think about the stressful situations in our lives to improve our stress management capabilities and coping skills.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Page 2: The 66-Day Reset: Setting New Healthy Habits

Page 3: Flow and the Self: Have You Lost Your Own Mojo?

Page 4: Dealing with Work Stress

Page 8: Helping Your Child Build Positive Self-Esteem

Page 10: Upcoming Webinars

Page 11: Did You Know?

REGISTER NOW

**Date: April 25, 2024
Time: 2:00-3:00 PM**

THE 66-DAY RESET: SETTING NEW HEALTHY HABITS

Why 66 days?

It takes approximately 66 days to form a habit. If you can make it through the first push, then you are settled in for the rest of the year. However, to effectively set and maintain these habits, you need to prioritize them. It's easy for people to tell you to prioritize your goals—but once you get back into your usual work, play, and sleep routine, it becomes much more difficult. You have deadlines, stressors, relationships, and personal issues that all start arising. Sometimes all it takes is one day of feeling like pizza instead of a salad, and you give up on the whole goal.

Overcoming setbacks and maintaining motivation can help you consistently strive to achieve your goals. But before you deal with these setbacks, you need to ensure the building blocks are stable. By prioritizing good habits, you can embark on a journey of progress and achieve your goals.

So, how do I actually set these good habits?

Creating good habits requires commitment, perseverance, and resilience. You can use a few handy hints to try and make it past the 66-day threshold, and set your habits into daily routine:

- **Link your new habit to an existing one.** For example, say your goal was to become more aware of global issues. When you wake up in the morning and check your phone to turn off your alarm, spend 10 minutes reading the top news headlines. Gradually, checking your phone will become associated with reading headlines, and you will begin to increase your awareness of global issues.
- **Share your new habit.** Tell people that you are trialing a new idea and changing your behavior—you can even ask them to check in with you. This consolidates the idea in your mind and leads to increased accountability.
- **Make yourself accountable.** Write your habit down, and check things off. Set follow-up dates—work on your new habit for a minimum of 30 days, with no exceptions. Then, try to extend this to 50 days, then 70. This takes you over the threshold of 66 days, and your new habit should be fully formed.



It's easier said than done... How do I prioritize these habits?

- Start a journal or use the notes app on your phone, and write down all of the tasks that you want to achieve that day.
- Take a minute to identify whether you'll actually be able to complete those tasks on that day. If not, make a second "ongoing projects" list.
- Put them in order of urgency for the day—considering if one task is essential for another to be completed, or if other people are waiting on specific tasks.
- Move the task you are least looking forward to doing first. Get it over and done with, and be proud of yourself for doing so.
- At the end of the day, write a list of things that you might not have gotten around to so you can start fresh the next day with another list of priorities. The tasks moved to the next day should be labeled "2" and continue to increase as the day does. Then, try to complete the highest numbers as they are the ones you have been putting off for the longest.

FLOW AND THE SELF: HAVE YOU LOST YOUR OWN MOJO?

- Focus on one task at a time—it can be easy to get distracted when you hit a block at work. You might want to jump from one task to the other, but this can end up being detrimental to your end result. You are better off taking a small break and then returning to the same task.
- Remember that setbacks are all a part of the journey, but with consistency and motivation, you can make progress, achieve your goals, and form healthy habits. You've got this!

Source: Veretis. (2024, January 17). *The 66-day reset: Setting new healthy habits* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).



What is *flow*?

To be in a state of flow is to be utterly absorbed in an activity, with time seeming to pass in the blink of an eye. It is a mental state in which one's whole being is completely immersed, typically in an activity that one enjoys and is skilled at. While flow typically occurs when undertaking creative pursuits, it can also be found in physical pursuits, such as running, dancing, and playing sports.

The concept of flow was conceived by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a respected psychologist whose work focused on the psychology of wellbeing, achievement, and a meaningful life. When people engage in an activity that promotes a state of flow, they derive many benefits, including:

- Increased life fulfillment
- Increased happiness and joy
- Improved performance in that particular activity
- Further learning and development
- Feelings of serenity and a loss of self-consciousness

Lost your mojo? Time to find some flow.

It is not uncommon to feel like you have lost your mojo in life and question where your life is going at times. It might be that you got to where you thought you wanted, but now that you're there, you feel unsatisfied. At times, you might feel this way when outside pressures and other people's expectations have dictated where to go.

To find happiness in life and rediscover your mojo, you have to act instead of sitting down and waiting for it to come to you. Often a lot of where you need to go comes from looking at the past and looking for moments of flow that might already be occurring. Asking yourself the following questions might help you identify activities that procedure a state of flow:

- What actions energized you over the past year?
- What actions inspired you the most?
- When did you feel the proudest, and what were you doing?

If you are unsure about what makes you happy and makes you flow, it might be time to try new things. You might want to pick up a musical instrument, try new sports, read some interesting books, or just start writing and see where you go!

Tips for Achieving Flow

Goals

Once you've found an activity you enjoy and feel relatively skilled at, it's important to follow some simple rules to get the most out of it. These include:

- Setting clear goals as to what you are doing
- Eliminating any distractions (phones, etc.) to ensure your flow is not disrupted
- Adding elements of challenge (i.e. setting realistic but challenging goals)
- Selecting activities that provide immediate and unambiguous feedback



Incorporating Flow into a Meaningful Life

In his work, Mihaly wrote, "If a person sets out to achieve a difficult enough goal, from which all other goals logically flow, and if [they] invest all energy in developing skills to reach that goal, then actions and feelings will be in harmony, and the separate parts of life will fit together—and each activity will make sense in the present as well as in the view of the past and of the future. In such a way, it is possible to give meaning to one's entire life."

Mihaly's work ties in nicely with the work of psychologist Martin Seligman and his PERMA-V model. This model gives insight into how and what people need to be doing to be in a state of thriving and wellbeing, which ultimately lead to a flow state. Seligman's PERMA-V model includes the following:

- P—Positive emotion
- E—Engagement and connectedness
- R—Enhanced Relationships
- M—Meaning and purpose in their pursuits
- A—Sense of Achievement
- V—Vigour (vitality and energy through self-care)

DEALING WITH WORK STRESS

It's normal—even helpful—to experience some stress at work. The right level of stress can sharpen your thinking and motivate you to do good work. However, too much stress, endured for too long, can be draining. It can be bad for your health, your relationships, and the quality of your work. Also, your reactions to excess stress can have a negative effect on the people around you.

How can you deal with unhealthy and unproductive work stress? Here are some tips.

RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS OF EXCESS STRESS.

The first step in dealing with stress is learning to recognize its warning signs. Excess stress affects your body and mind. Without knowing its signs, stress can build gradually to the point where you're paralyzed with anxiety, lash out in anger at coworkers, or feel like you can't succeed.

So, pay attention to the signs of work stress. These may include physical signs, such as:

- Muscle tension or headaches
- Stomach problems
- Sweating
- Trouble sleeping
- Low energy or fatigue
- Rapid heart rate

They can also include mental and emotional signs, such as:

- Apathy and loss of interest in work
- Trouble concentrating
- Anxiety, irritability, or feelings of depression
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs

IDENTIFY YOUR STRESS TRIGGERS.

As you become more attuned to the signs of stress, make an effort to identify what causes your stress level to rise. This might be obvious: a long stretch with extra work, worry about the possibility of layoffs, or tense relationships with coworkers or your manager. There may also be triggers to your stress that you haven't recognized, things that might bother you more than other people—perhaps because of your past experience or simply your particular personality.

As an exercise, keep notes for a week or two on when you feel an extra level of stress and what might be triggering those reactions:

- Where were you and what were you doing just before your stress level started to rise?
- Who were you interacting with?
- What were you thinking and feeling?



These notes, and your reflections on them, can help you identify your unique stress triggers.

Once you've identified your most important stressors at work, think about how you might deal with them. For each stressor you identify, write down steps you might take to address it in a positive way. That might mean getting a better handle on your workload to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Or it might mean learning to recognize and control negative thinking or irrational fears.

REDUCE WORK STRESS BY TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF.

If stress from work is having a negative effect on your work output, your health, your relationships, or your life outside of work, it's time to step back and pay attention to your basic needs:

- **Get moving.** Physical activity is important to your health and is one of the most effective stress reducers. Take a walk during a break in the workday—even if it's just for five minutes—to interrupt a feeling of rising tension. Build more physical activity into your daily and weekly schedule.
- **Sleep well.** Adopt healthy sleep habits to get more rest. That means a regular bedtime and no work or electronic devices as you wind down for sleep.
- **Build healthy eating habits.** Avoid stress-driven eating, which can lead to weight gain and swings in blood sugar and energy. A regular schedule of healthy meals and snacks can help keep your emotions on an even keel.

- **Make time for fun and social connections.** Your emotional health is tied to your physical health, and it is important for sustained work performance. Include your own emotional needs in your priorities.

LEARN TO RELAX.

Relaxation is a skill that can be learned. When you feel tense from work stress, practice relaxation techniques that work for you. These might include:

- Deep breathing to restore a feeling of calm
- Progressive muscle relaxation to intentionally relax your body and mind
- Mindfulness or meditation to pull your thinking out of a cycle of worry and restore an ability to focus
- Listening to calming music

Take quick relaxation breaks at work or use a relaxation transition as you begin and end the workday.

SHARPEN YOUR FOCUS AT WORK.

If your stress is coming from feelings of overwork or a lack of control over your work, think about ways you might regain control, confidence, and calm:

- **Work with your manager** to set realistic goals and expectations. If particular aspects of your work are causing more stress than others, it might be a sign that you need more training on those tasks. Or perhaps work on the team might be shifted so that you and other team members focus more on what you enjoy and are good at.
- **Prioritize to focus on the most important work**—the work that will have the biggest impact on your team's and organization's success and that will meet the most important needs of your customers. Work that seems urgent but is less important may need to wait.
- **Break big tasks into small steps**, and map out a schedule to get them done.
- **Use to-do lists** to stay on top of your tasks.
- **Protect your time** to minimize interruptions and enable concentrated focus. Schedule time for planning and work on bigger projects.
- **Delegate and collaborate.** Where possible, share responsibilities and enlist the help and ideas of others.



TAKE TIME TO RECHARGE.

No one can run a marathon at a sprinter's pace. To avoid burnout and succeed over the long term, you need to take breaks to recharge:

- **Take quick breaks.** A five-minute break for a walk or deep breathing can relax your body and restore your mind so that you can focus more efficiently and creatively on the problem at hand. The distraction of watching a funny video or having a quick conversation with a friend can have the same effect. The point is to get your mind off work so that you can come back to it with renewed energy.
- **Schedule time for your own needs**—for family, friends, exercise, and breaks to relax and restore your energy.
- **Use your vacation time** to refresh and recharge yourself. "Working vacations" tend not to be vacations at all and don't have the same restorative effect.

TALK IT OVER.

When you endure your work worries alone, stress can build up. A conversation with a trusted coworker or friend can release that tension. It may also give you a fresh perspective and new ideas on ways you might respond. You might even get an offer of help—if not with the core work issue you're facing, then with something else that can free you to focus on work with less distraction.

Be sure to return the favor when the opportunity arises. Helping, listening, and collaborating are keys to effective teamwork and a balanced, satisfying life.

If you need help prioritizing in a work crunch, talk it over with your manager. Knowing what's critical and what can wait can reduce the pressure you're feeling and help you regain a sense of control over your work.

FLIP NEGATIVE THINKING.

Some work stress is caused by negative thinking and unnecessary worry:

- **Practice positive reframing.** When you find yourself looking too quickly and too often at the downside of work events and interactions, push yourself to imagine alternative and more positive outcomes. Then think about the steps you might take to make those positive outcomes happen.
- **Focus on achievements.** When you feel daunted by the work ahead, take a minute to consider the progress you've made. Think back to past achievements and other challenges you've overcome.
- **Challenge negative thoughts.** Is what you are worrying about really true? What might be a more positive and equally reasonable explanation?

AVOID UNPRODUCTIVE CONFLICT AND DRAINING WORK INTERACTIONS.

Some conflict with coworkers is healthy and productive. Talking through different opinions on the best solution to a work problem can get your team to a better solution than any one of you might come to on your own. However, some work conflicts and interactions are emotionally draining and should be avoided:

- **Steer clear of gossip.** It can lead to negative talk and undermine team morale.
- **Avoid people with consistently negative outlooks.** Complainers and doomsayers create stress for the people around them. If you're forced to work closely with a coworker who spreads negativity, talk to your manager about ways to handle these interactions.
- **Be cautious in sharing political and religious views at work.** If your views are not relevant to your work or the work of your team, they're probably best kept to yourself. If political or religious discussions are fueling conflict at work, talk with your manager or human resources (HR) representative for help in setting boundaries.
- **Strive to resolve conflict in positive ways.** Focus on the present and what you can agree on to move forward. Don't dwell on past hurts or resentments. If a conflict can't be resolved and isn't critical to work progress, agree to disagree and walk away from it.

- **Focus on what you can control, and let go of what you can't.** In working with other people, you may be able to influence the way they behave, but you can't control it. You can control your own behavior and how you react to what others do and say. Put your focus there.

KNOW WHEN TO SEEK HELP.

If you've tried the steps above and you're still feeling stressed, overwhelmed, or discouraged, you might benefit from talking with a mental health professional. Your employee support program is one source for this help. An expert at the program can listen and offer practical suggestions in a phone or video consultation and can refer you to a mental health counselor for additional support.

You might also find a psychologist or mental health counselor on your own. An expert can help you understand the source of your stress and help you take steps to address it. That might be by changing ingrained habits of thought and behavior, by forming a strategy for better communication with your manager and coworkers, or by treating a clinical problem such as depression or anxiety disorder that could be contributing to your feelings of stress.

Source: Morgan, H. (2021, January 21). Dealing with work stress (B. Schuette & C. Gregg-Meeker, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.



HELPING YOUR CHILD BUILD POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is a person's evaluation of themselves—how they see their value and abilities. Positive self-esteem gives a child the confidence to try new things and persevere through challenges and frustrations. Positive self-esteem, along with empathy, kindness, and other positive qualities, is one of the building blocks of future success in life. It plays a key role in a child's motivation to learn, success in school, comfort in social relationships, and ability to deal with life's inevitable obstacles and setbacks.

Your child's self-esteem is built on a foundation of feeling loved and secure, starting at an early age, then it grows and is strengthened by feelings of competence as your child grows older. Here are some ways to help your child develop positive self-esteem:



- **Encourage your child to try new things and take reasonable risks.** You've probably done this naturally since your child was a baby—holding their hand as they first learned to walk, for example. As your child grows older, keep encouraging this exploration and experimentation—helping as needed, but more and more stepping back to let your child try new things on their own, even when that involves mistakes, stumbles, messes, and tears.
- **Allow your child to make mistakes and learn from them.** Protect your child from serious harm, of course, but avoid being overprotective and shielding your child from valuable new experiences. Children are naturally resilient, and they become even stronger and more resilient through having opportunities to make the missteps that come naturally with all learning. Coach your child through particularly tricky social situations, but also give them a chance to figure out how to recover from mistakes and setbacks and find new ways to deal with challenges.

- **Provide appropriate praise.** Praising everything your child does can backfire, undermining rather than boosting their self-esteem. Inaccurate and unfocused praise will only confuse your child. If they believe the praise, they can get a false picture of their abilities, only to have it shattered later by experiences outside the home. If they don't, they can begin to question your credibility. Instead, offer specific praise, stating what your child has done or how they've behaved that has impressed you. Make a point of praising their efforts as well as their accomplishments, especially their perseverance or creativity in solving a problem or dealing with an obstacle. Praise your child when they exhibit other qualities, too, such as kindness, generosity, patience, or the ability to regulate their emotions.
- **When giving criticism or correction, address the behavior, not the child.** It's appropriate and sometimes necessary to let a child know that they've behaved badly. It's never appropriate to call them a "bad" child (or a "lazy," "careless," or "stupid" child). When giving criticism, calm yourself and speak to your child with respect. Explain what they've done that bothers you, the consequences of their words or actions, and how you'd like them to behave in the future.



- **Focus on your child's strengths and encourage their interests.** Pay attention to what your child does well, and support them in further developing these strengths. Notice when they start showing an interest in something new, and help to fuel that interest. Give them the time to pursue it and help them learn more about it.
- **Encourage healthy friendships.** Teach your child that good friends support each other and make each other feel better, not worse, about themselves. Help them be that kind of friend to others. Encourage them to consider how their various friends make them feel, and to spend more time with the friends with whom they feel liked and valued for being themselves.
- **Let your child be helpful in useful ways.** Contributing to the activities of maintaining the household can help a child feel competent and valued. Assign your child age-appropriate chores. Let them help in reasonable ways with tidying up, cooking, setting the table, washing dishes, or other tasks. Encourage an older child to help in the care of a younger sibling, perhaps by reading them a bedtime story.
- **Show your unconditional love.** Through all of life's ups and downs, whether praising something wonderful your child has done or pointing out misbehavior, let your child know that you love them no matter what. Be careful not to give the impression your love must be earned with accomplishment, or that it can be withdrawn because of failure or disappointment. Guide your child to be the best they can be, but always do it with love.



Source: Morgan, H. (2023, December 18). Helping your child build positive self-esteem (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).



Employee Advisory Service

UPCOMING WEBINARS EMPLOYEES

How to Change Your Perspective to Better Cope with Stress

Date / Time

- April 25, 2024
- 2:00 – 3:00 PM

About this webinar:

This practical presentation will discuss strategies for managing the way we look at and think about the stressful situations in our lives to improve our stress management capabilities and coping skills.



REGISTER NOW



How to Utilize Communication Skills to Maximize Career Success

Date / Time

- May 23, 2024
- 2:00 – 3:00 PM

About this webinar:

Many experts agree that good communication skills are vital to career success. This important session will discuss the core skills necessary to communicate effectively in both one on one and group settings, including emotional intelligence, listening respectfully, having collaborative conversations, and making memorable presentations.



REGISTER NOW



Four Steps to Resolving Conflict and Restoring Relationships

Date / Time

- June 27, 2024
- 2:00 – 3:00 PM

About this webinar:

This important presentation provides a practical approach to identifying the needs of people during disagreement and conflict, respectfully gaining understanding of their opinion and goals, assessing the potential for compromise, and how to agree to disagree. In addition, the session will review communication approaches and skills crucial to maintaining and restoring relationships as you work through difficult conversations.



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DID YOU KNOW?

THE EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE (EAS) CAN HELP YOU TO BETTER MANAGE STRESS.

Is workplace stress affecting your home life?
Are you finding it increasingly more difficult to balance home and work responsibilities?
Is stress in your personal life affecting your ability to be productive at work?


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- Suggestions to help you create a better work/life balance
- Stress management techniques
- Referrals for issues that may be contributing to your stress i.e. financial issues, legal problems, child/elder care concerns



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