

Getting up on the wrong side of the bed

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We've all had those days. The ones when you're looking for an important document, and after searching frantically for a half hour you realize that you forgot to save it; when you rub your face and discover you have lipstick on your eye; when you're rushing and the computer won't boot up and you can't get online; when you fight with the serviceman over something stupid, and then you get cut off as you try to exit the highway.... You get it, right?

When our children were younger and the day started off poorly, I told them that I thought they'd gotten up on the wrong side of the bed and needed to start the day all over again. I'd send them back to their room with the instructions to open their door slowly, with a big smile on their face, calmly walk down the stairs, and give me a huge "Good morning, Mommy." To my surprise, this actually worked, and we began the day anew, in a much better way.

As adults, we, too, have to do this.

When someone drives poorly, cuts me off and tweaks my road-rage nerve, I try to remind myself that I have no idea what difficulties he has experienced in the past hour – whether someone became ill, he heard bad news, or he is alone and has no one to share his life with. This helps me be just a little kinder and not

honk the horn, and keeps my blood pressure from escalating. By calming myself, I work to forgive him and, more importantly, to "let go" of the situation and forget about it, so I can move on, without it impacting the rest of my day or my health.

Some days we are able to do this more easily than others.

HERE ARE just a few ideas of what you can do to enhance your well-being when you feel that, for the moment, life has treated you poorly.

1. Never underestimate the power of breathing well. Two slow deep breaths, done properly, refocus you and calm your nervous system and help slow you down in order to respond more intentionally instead of reactively. Try it. I promise, it works.

Once you are calm, you can regain a sense of control, strategize, and make a plan. It cannot happen otherwise.

2. Ask not what your life should do for you, but rather what you can do for your life. This enables you to feel less helpless and be more hopeful.

Be in the moment: remind yourself that in this moment you are okay, even if what's happening is not what you expected. Take note of just how okay you really are. Decide what you would like the moment to look like, and see how you can make some part of that dream happen, right now.

3. Get a different perspective by taking a step

backward. Ask if what is currently happening is really as disastrous as you make it out to be. When you reflect on what is truly important, a smashed car mirror, being cut off, arriving late are all relatively unimportant. Will you even remember these events in five years?

People and relationships are more important than incidents or day-to-day "stuff," so get your priorities straight and find the time to be with those people, and in those relationships, you care about.

4. Carry out an attitude check. Your day, and how content you are in life, does not have to depend on the bad driver, the missing paper, the rude serviceman, or even disgruntled family members. It depends on you.

5. Remind yourself that anger is a wasted emotion, and that if you are yelling, you are out of control.

6. Look at your language: your self-talk, as well as how you speak to others. What messages do you give about who you are? How can you be more positive?

Enhance each of your relationships by noticing the positive and limiting the negative (a ratio of 5:1 is what the experts recommend). It is so easy to pick up someone else's negativity and feel drained. Being empathic doesn't mean taking on someone else's problems or negative attitude.

7. Life may not be fair, but in the end, your day depends on you. Only you can decide what you choose to make of it. Work to put meaning into your life and make each day special.

8. Do something nice for someone else. Acts of kindness not only make the other person feel appreciated and valued, but lift your spirits as well, and take you on a better emotional journey.

9. Reassess your priorities; figure out what is really important and what is just "stuff." You may discover that the "stuff" weighs you down, and you need to find a way to get rid of it, literally and metaphorically, so it doesn't interfere with what is really important in life.

10. How do you relate to time? If you never have enough time to accomplish what you "need" to do, it's possible that you try to do too much, procrastinate, or get sidetracked.

Could restructuring your time help? If so, determine how best to use your time.

11. Pamper yourself in small ways. A massage, manicure, or both, can be just the pick-me-up you need. It need not be costly.

12. Look after your body: It's the only one you have, so use it wisely. Like a fine car, it needs proper fuel, to be driven regularly, and kept in shape, while knowing when it is overheating. Take it on vacation and enjoy.

13. Be your own best friend. If your friend had a problem or her day wasn't going well, you'd listen and help her find a way to move on and let it go. You might have a chat, do something fun, or even laugh at how bad things seem. Work at being your own best friend, because that is the best person you can be.

At the end of the day, things happen beyond our control. It is up to you to figure out how to laugh at them and turn lemons into lemonade. ■

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