12 Ways to Turn Around a Terrible Day

By Jessica Stillman | November 9, 2010

Entry-Level Rebel

We all have lousy days. You know the kind I mean — problem clients, cranky co-workers, bad evaluations or personal life stress collide and make for a really epic bad mood (and for some reason it always seems to be raining). So what can you do when the universe seems to conspire to make your life unpleasant? **Gretchen Rubin**, author of *The Happiness Project*, comes to the rescue with tips, and not just two or three. On her blog she offers a whopping 12 ways to deal with a terrible day (which is good, sometimes you need all the help you can get.)

- **Resist the urge to "treat" yourself**. Often, the things we choose as "treats" aren't good for us. The pleasure lasts a minute, but then feelings of guilt, loss of control, and other negative consequences just deepen the lousiness of the day.

- **Do something nice for someone else**. "Do good, feel good" – this really works. Be selfless, if only for selfish reasons.

- **Distract yourself**. When my older daughter was born, she had to be in Neonatal Intensive Care for a week. I spent every hour at the hospital, until my husband dragged me away to go to an afternoon movie. I didn't want to go, but afterward, I realized that I was much better able to cope with the situation after having had a bit of relief.

- **Seek inner peace through outer order**. Soothe yourself by tackling a messy closet, an untidy desk, or crowded countertops. The sense of tangible progress, control, and orderliness can be a comfort.

- **Tell yourself, "Well, at least I…"** Get some things accomplished. Yes, you had a horrible day, but at least you went to the gym, or played with your kids, or walked the dog, or recycled.

- **Exercise is an extremely effective mood booster** – but be careful of exercise that allows you to ruminate. For example, if I go for a walk when I'm upset about something, I often end up feeling worse, because the walk provides me with uninterrupted time in which to dwell obsessively on my troubles.

- **Stay in contact**. When you're having a lousy day, it's tempting to retreat into isolation. Studies show, though, that contact with other people boosts mood.

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- **Things really will look brighter in the morning**. Go to bed early and start the next day anew. Also, sleep deprivation puts a drag on mood in the best of circumstances, so a little extra sleep will do you good.

- **Remind yourself of your other identities**. If you feel like a loser at work, send out a blast email to engage with college friends. If you think members of the PTA are mad at you, don't miss the spinning class where everyone knows and likes you.

- **Keep perspective**. Ask yourself: "Will this matter in a month? In a year?"

- **Write it down**. When something horrible is consuming my mind, I find that if I write up a paragraph or two about the situation, I get immense relief.

- **Be grateful**. Remind yourself that a *lousy* day isn't a *catastrophic* day. Be grateful that you're still on the "lousy" spectrum. Probably, things could be worse.