

AS SEEN IN
enLIGHTenment
MAGAZINE
DECEMBER 2019

Getting of the RUT

Feeling “stuck?” Good news! I have tips that can help you get out of your own way and renew your positive momentum.

BY MARK OKUN

There is no getting around it; every once in a while, we all get in a rut. The main reason it happens is because of routine, with people moving through most of their days on autopilot. We wake up at the same time every day, we drive the same routes to our destinations, our actions are predictable and consistent, and so we feel that every day is the same.

This daily repetition plows a rut through our work environments and begins to bore into our brains, giving us a hard hit in work performance. Here are some clues for identifying whether you are at risk of digging a rut in your life or if you are already firmly entrenched in one.

RUT-OH

How did we get in this rut? It wasn't a personal choice. We don't wake up one day and say to ourselves, “I think I will do the same things the same way every day for so long I will exhaust myself.”

CLUE #1: Your motivation is sapped. You may have the desire to try new things, but when it is time to take action, there is a lack of enthusiasm.

CLUE #2: You feel bored with both old and new undertakings. Nothing lights you up; every day is the same. If being in a rut had a color, it would be grey or no color at all.

CLUE #3: You feel something's not quite right and know you need to make an internal change, but you are reluctant to try. While we accept some temporary discomfort for a permanent gain, when we're in a rut, our fear of failure overrides action. The impact of staying in a rut too long can have a negative effect on our health, well-being, and work life.

ROUTINE HAS A RUT HIDDEN INSIDE

Not all ruts are equal. We can have ruts in both our personal and work lives, and the clues are the same.

When I think of boring routines, my mind immediately thinks of fast food employees and flight attendants: “Would you like fries with that?” and “When the seat belt sign illuminates, you must fasten your seat belt” respectively.

What you do and say contributes to your work rut. Even if your actions are a job requirement, change it up a bit. If I were coaching the fast food industry, I would suggest they break their rut in the way that they offer fries. Instead of the usual phrase, how about “Do you want FRESH, HOT, TASTY fries with that?”

Many Southwest Airlines flight attendants break the monotony of pre-flight announcements by delivering the safety instructions in a fun way to get passengers' attention. Take a tip from them and get out of your rut by adding some humor.

CHANGE YOUR ROUTINE

Start with small changes that are easy to implement. Change up your morning practices to begin the day with a twist. This can be as simple as starting your day earlier, moving around the time of day that you eat meals, or by altering the route you take to and from work. These seemingly insignificant changes will send signals to the brain that something is different.

When a task becomes routine, there is often a loss of emotion and, ultimately, the real purpose of the assignment itself. One simple, everyday task that happens in every showroom is greeting the client. Based on many observations of salespeople, I find most have their own repetitive greetings that they say over and over, day in and day out. Without getting too deep into the structure and delivery, think about what you say. Keep the context of “welcoming” someone, but change up the words and delivery.

THE RUT IS COMFORT

We all get comfortable with routines and to keep them from becoming a rut, we must leave our comfort zones. This should be an easy step given all the channel changes that impact us in showroom sales. Try adding something new to your skillset; what segment of your industry do you want to know more about? It could be anything from adding a new product category to learning new marketing skills such as blogging or vlogging.

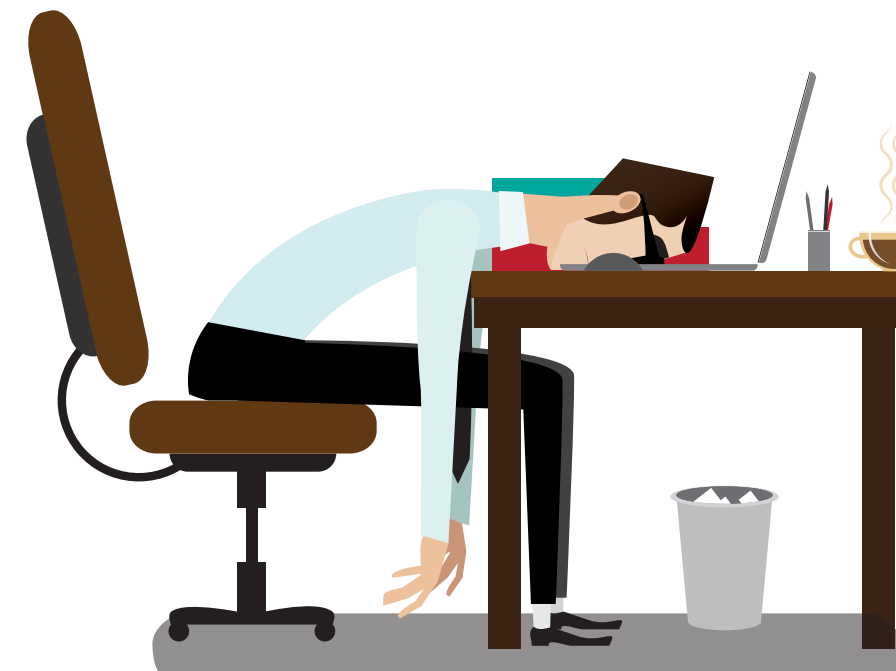
Getting out of that comfy and familiar zone takes just a couple of steps and, as you progress, your fear will become excitement. How uncomfortable are you willing to get to break free from the rut? Since this is the last month before the new year, goal-setting is on our minds.

Setting different goals that may be peripheral to your daily routine go a long way toward keeping the excitement alive. The simple goals for getting out of a rut are discovered based on your own self-examination and are not the typical DO MORE objectives.

One showroom I am familiar with has had an increase of Russian population in the community. We established a goal for all staff members to learn a few regularly used phrases in Russian. They learned hello, goodbye, thank you, and the kicker: “Would you like to buy that?” The sales team could visually see the clients' excitement as they looked at items. Even when the sales associates did not know the exact words being exchanged between the clients, when asking a closing question in the client's native language, they frequently got a positive response. When they didn't, they were able to figure out how to move forward with the sale.

These out-of-the-box goals can be expressed in a modified goal-setting format. The two most essential rules in “rut breaking” is to keep the change goal simple and make it fun.

“Simple changes in repetitive patterns can help break you out.”





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THE GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

The workplace is a unique environment to suggest gamification, but most of the work worlds I see need to add more fun. If you are in the sales profession, you are by nature, competitive. What better way to break out of a rut than to have some fun doing it?

Please take a look at your workday. Each of us has monotonous tasks to be accomplished daily aside from the prime objective of selling and servicing clients. When thinking of the repetitive functions that showroom staffers face – such as email and housekeeping – try gaming these tasks. The principle behind this type of gamification is its singular focus. Like snowboarding, cycling, or golf, the competition is to beat our own levels of performance and excel beyond the personal goals we set for ourselves.

In our email example, turn answering or sending emails into a game. Do you complete your daily email tasks in 30 minutes or maybe one hour? Can you beat that time? Ask yourself, “How can I complete this quicker?” Before starting the game, determine the amount of time you spend on email daily. This is an easy one to win as most people look at emails throughout the day. My tip is to not make email your first priority of the day; it saps the creative energy needed to sell and can send you down the rabbit hole before the day begins. You need a process, and the Pomodoro Technique® is a good one. Set a timer for 25 minutes and attack your email. When the timer goes off, stand up, take a break, and then count your results. Whenever possible in a showroom setting, do not let anything interrupt you when you’re in the zone. Focus on the task and keep the self-talk positive.

GET YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME & OUT OF THE RUT

In his book *First Things First*, the late author and businessman Steven Covey wrote about the power that having a “passion of vision” provides.

Think about the internal dialogue you have: What are you saying, is it positive or negative? As you may know, there is a trinity out there called Thought, Word & Deed. Your thoughts impact the words you use and the actions you take. If that self-talk is negative, you will erode your confidence and destroy the goal of increased performance and rut break-out.

With each task that you gamify, plan the self-talk that goes with winning the self-imposed challenge.

Using the email example in the previous paragraph, many of you read it and immediately said to yourself, “I can’t do that!” and you had a plethora of reasons to support your thoughts. Maybe those words were so strong that you didn’t even try to take on the activity in a new way.

If this is the case, you have experienced, and set in your mind, a negative vision of the future. Instead, look at the challenge and say, “No problem, I can get that done in 20 minutes.” No matter which voice you give power to, you will be correct.

In my experience, when you can discover the ruts in your daily undertakings, you have found an opportunity to improve yourself and your performance. I hope as the New Year comes upon us, one of your 2020 professional goals is to hunt for the ruts in both showroom and personal performance. Once ruts are discovered, fill them in with different actions that get you out of the rut.

As Always, Happy Selling! ❖

“Your mental attitude attracts to you everything that makes you what you are.”

—Napoleon Hill, author of *Think and Grow Rich*



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