



Harnessing joy for the holidays

December 2021

Every year, around mid-November, many of us start the countdown until the holiday break. And while having something to look forward to is often a good thing, how can we finish strong and avoid collapsing when we cross that finish line? How can we make the most of our holiday season so we can return in 2022 with more fuel in the tank? More than ever, our strategies to refuel when breaks arrive are essential to ongoing buoyancy and engagement.

Here are a few ideas to make the most of your refueling over the holidays:

1. Establish your needs for the break

It's not uncommon for us to come out of the holidays thinking, 'I need a vacation to recover from the holidays.' It is easy to get swept up in the expectations and needs of others, or the expectations we put on ourselves. Ask yourself how you want to feel at the end of the break. Rested? Rejuvenated? Energized? Refueled? _____? The companion question to this is 'what actions might I take to ensure I feel this way?' Establish a plan for making time to meet those needs. Your plan might need to include saying 'no' to some things so you can say 'yes' to your own needs for refueling.

2. Set healthy boundaries

In our technology-laden world with accessibility at our fingertips combined with cognitively challenging occupations, I often remark that we could work 24/7 if we're not careful (the sound notification of an email coming in launches into problem-solving mode and the next thing we know, we're cognitively at work while lying awake in bed at 3am!). Start by setting tangible barriers between you and your work. For example, reflect on your practices around email-checking.

How accessible are you? Can you create some tangible boundaries and distance between you and work? Next, consider your cognitive connection. Can you make a conscious decision to 'put down' your cognitive load over the holidays and really be present and engaged with your holiday-related activities? Acknowledge that the work will be waiting for you on the other side of the break, when you're fueled up and ready to take it on.

3. Develop a 'heading on holiday' ritual

Rituals that allow us to tangibly and cognitively 'put down' our work can allow us to let go and re-focus our energy on refueling over breaks. Everyone has different rituals around this, but some of mine include:

- Setting aside some time before I officially 'sign off' on break to prepare my list of important items upon my return and to close out anything I can (it even includes tidying my desk/office so I know I'll be welcomed into a clean space upon my return).
- Consciously choosing a landmark on my drive home for when I say 'goodbye work' and mentally put it away can allow me to shift gears and really be present in my home life.
- Proactively blocking off some time in my calendar on the other side of the break (first day back) can help me to really let go on my break knowing I've set up some strategies for easing back into work on the other side.

4. Make a JOY list

Joy is a word we hear a lot around the holidays and perhaps not enough throughout the rest of the year. What brings you joy? Sometimes we can't answer this



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question for ourselves. We can benefit from spending time discovering what brings us joy. Harnessing the spirit of the holiday and cultivating a 'Joy List' can be helpful to re-engage with ourselves about what brings us joy as well as setting us up in a good way for days when we need a little more joy in our lives. On hard days, we can go to our 'Joy List' and pick an item to engage in. How much JOY can you include in your holiday season for yourself?

5. Take it one day at a time

It can be easy to spend our break counting the days until our return out of a multitude of reasons, including worrying they're going by too quickly. Do your best to cultivate a presence in each day, one at a time. Spending some time at the start of each day setting an intention for focus and connection to the day can really help us harness our presence each day. A quick journal entry answering the question, 'I'll know I've been present and connected today if at the end of the day I feel _____ and to harness that feeling I will _____ today.' A quick morning reflection can set the tone for your day and help you stay in the present.

Please reach out to the [BCPVPA EIP Program](#) if you would like some support and guidance around remaining professionally well.

Wishing you presence, connection, JOY, and rest this holiday season!

With respect and admiration,

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Darby is a registered clinical counsellor who describes her work calling as 'caring for people who care for people' and has worked supporting leaders and workers in complex human serving systems (health care and education) for over a decade. She specifically supports teachers and school leaders at this time and finds deep joy and honour in her work.

The humanworks EIP column appears in BCPVPA's eNews the first Friday of each month.