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How to Muddle Through August

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Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley recently launched a new blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her one-paragraph musings on politics, business, and anything else that strikes her fancy.*

The other day, I went to my optometrist for an annual eye examination. Although my eyesight had changed little since last year, I decided to treat myself to a new pair of glasses. As I was trying on frames, always a Catch-22 process without proper lenses, the optician mentioned that August tends to be the slowest month of the year in his industry. "Makes sense to me," I thought. "Who the heck needs to see straight while lolling on their decks and sipping pina coladas?"

A few hours later, I was browsing in a new clothing consignment shop near my home in suburban Philadelphia. The owner said the same thing about August. "Yeah, that fits," I thought. "Everyone is running around half naked to get some relief from this oppressive heat. Why buy clothes?"

On my last errand of the day, I noticed that the tools section of the Sears store in my neighborhood mall was practically deserted. A clerk there also attributed the emptiness to, guess what, August. "I get that," I thought. "As much as I ordinarily adore puttying tile and banging nails with my Craftsman whatchamajigs, I realize other people may lack my gifts with chainsaws and other heavy construction equipment."

And so, in case you haven't caught my drift, you may as well bag the remainder of August for conducting any kind of business. Just sweat your way through it. Although some of the economic slowdown I encountered may be due to the current poor economy, business people across the United States have known for decades that August is, indeed, is a real snoozer.

This month's meltdown is so evident that David Plotz, a writer for Slate.com, recently suggested in a satirical piece that it be eliminated. "August is the Mississippi of the calendar," Plotz wrote. "It's beastly hot and muggy. It has a dismal history. Nothing good ever happens in it. And the United States would be better off without it. August is when the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when Anne Frank was arrested, when the first income tax was collected, when Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe died. Wings and Jefferson Airplane were formed in August. The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour debuted in August."

Wait a minute. Sonny and Cher on a list of bad things? Although I have always been fascinated by the female half of that singing duo, probably because she's older than I am and still dares to wear scandalous outfits, I do feel out of sorts working in August when much of the world seems to be downing one more margarita. Nevertheless, I think there are other ways to muddle through the rest of the month without erasing it. Some ideas for coping on the job when your peers are sailing on yachts off Martha's Vineyard:

Work at a leisurely pace. This tactic is especially useful if your manager is on a beach somewhere in Thailand or Fiji. I suspect many of your tasks will turn out better without having a gun to your head. Rushing rarely improves the quality of anything.



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Lay off phone calls. Since so few people are at the office to answer, why waste your time trying to make the connection? Spend the next two weeks stuffing the email boxes of those lazy August vacationers. See how they like facing a mountain of messages when they step back into reality.

Reduce your hours. If you're used to putting in 12-hour days, now is the time to trim back to a mere 10. As for 24/7, I recommend cutting back to 8/5.

Focus on never-quite-get-to tasks. With few people pestering you at work, August is a great time to rearrange the furniture in your office, read trade journals piled up everywhere, plan your five-year career strategy. By September, I predict you'll have at least one desk drawer neat enough to show your mother.

Celebrate at home. As you undoubtedly know, I mean who doesn't, today is National Bratwurst Day. In case you forgot to prepare, I suggest you rush over to your local supermarket, pick up a boatload of German sausages, and heat up the grill. Won't your neighbors, now vacationing in Honolulu, be jealous when they find out what they missed?

Continue the festivities. Why stop at stuffing your face with bratwurst when you're on such a lazy-daisy roll? Personally, I plan to mark all of the following August holidays: National Spumoni Day on Aug. 21; National Cherry Popsicle Day on Aug. 26; and National Toasted Marshmallow Day on Aug. 30. My mouth salivates at the very thought of what's in store for my taste buds before summer ends. For a complete list of other similarly exciting upcoming occasions, check out www.thinkquest.org.

Take a long nap. Not at work, of course. But today, after your gala bratwurst celebration, I suggest you cover yourself in mosquito repellent, lie down on your reclining lawn chair, and snooze your way into oblivion. Give me a call and I'll be right over, along with my chaise lounge, SPF-1,000 suntan lotion, New Age music, lavender-scented candles, and sleeping mask. You don't snore, do you?

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody.