



How to Chill Out in Winter

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

January is always a slow month in my industry: corporate training. So I try to use the time catching up on activities left avoided and undone during the 40 weeks I spend each year on the road. Last month, as is my annual custom, I prepared myself with a long to-do list: call prospects, read trade journals, organize my office, arrange networking lunches, write articles, churn out sales proposals, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. The last five items are about what I accomplished from my home office. I have, indeed, been feeling blah.

One problem is that I have been watching entirely too much MSNBC and CNN cable news. Wow, the economic news is bleak; I barely remember a time when financial pundits discussed losses, shortfalls, deficits, and downright thievery in mere millions rather than billions of dollars. Another is that I caught a major cold on Christmas Eve cuddling with my five-year-old niece Sammy. The affection was more than worth every sniffle, but the need to be ever-close to a bathroom, tissues, and cough suppressants has cramped my style throughout January. Finally, the days and nights have been dank and dark. Can you spell seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a suspected cause of emotional depression?

There you have it. I have been listless, lethargic, lazy, lonely, looney-tunes, and many other "L" words you can think of. OK, not lesbian though, as comedian Jerry Seinfeld often says, there's nothing wrong with that. So now I have two choices. I can beat myself to a pulp for accomplishing nada. Or I can see my respite as a necessary time to invigorate and re-energize myself by watching the zillions of hours of Oprah programs I DVR-ed in 2008, but never have had a chance to watch.

I choose the latter, simply so I don't want to work myself into a tailspin of self-flagellation lasting through spring, summer, and autumn. Eventually, alas, I do have to snap out of my malaise. If you, too, have been sweating out the winter doldrums, here are some steps both you and I can take:

Think spiritually. My favorite spiritual verse is the psalm about the universe having every purpose under heaven. At my father's funeral 12 years ago, my sister movingly read the section about having a time to live -- and a time to die. I just sent an e-mail to Biblical superstar David, thought to be the author of most psalms, asking him to update his writing with a new paragraph about time to kick back and enjoy being a couch potato.

Look at animals. Lots of non-human creatures hibernate during winter. Why the heck do I have to have more energy than a 500-pound bear? I weigh 115, for heaven's sake.

Accept nature's help. Do you think snowstorms exist so you can slip and slide your way into a major highway accident? I think not. They are a good reason to turn off your telephone and drink hot chocolate.

Revel in illness. You know why scientists have not invented a cure for the common cold? No one wants them to, that's why. Suffering bronchial and intestinal distress, especially at the same time, is the perfect excuse to get out of all social and business engagements.

Use common sense. Have you noticed how many winter clothes have soft textures such as down and fleece? Obviously, they were made to use not in the hard, cruel world but in your soft,



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warm bed. Personally, I'm hoping for a cell phone call from God advising me to huddle under the covers until July 4.

Give yourself a break. Having way to much time recently to read celebrity magazines, I noticed that hordes of famous people spent the Christmas holidays in Cabo, Bora Bora, and the Bahamas. If singer actor Leonardo DiCaprio, comedian Ellen deGeneres, and actor John Travolta can maintain their high-voltage mega-million-dollar careers on vacation, why can't you and I?

Value preservation. According to my knowledge of chemistry, admittedly limited, boiling water and other liquids result in disintegration, explosions and al dente pasta. Freezing, on the other hand, is a time-honored method of preservation. I've decided to view winter as a mini-test of cryogenics, the after-death use of cold temperatures to stop the human decomposition process. Why not? At this point in life, the only decay I'm even moderately comfortable with is an occasional tooth cavity.

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