

Using A Helpful Cognitive Tool During the Pandemic

By

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The adjustments and changes we have made during the days of the pandemic have been a testimony to our collective ability to adapt and persist. We've been tested in deep ways from our disconnection from the greater community, to performing at a distance, roles so grounding to our sense of self.

We've also had the structures that keep us in rhythm challenged and this imbalance has increased stress in unsuspecting ways. For this, we need to draw on one of our most meaningful psychological tools. *Cognitive Override* enables us to take the "high road" and align with values at times when we are tempted to resign to less motivated and sluggish states. It's the force that enables us to rise instead of hitting the snooze five times or commit to a walk when the couch has us firmly in its grasp.

Here are five important daily uses of *Cognitive Override* as we manage the pandemic:

Natural rhythms. When quarantining or working from home, it is easy to push the natural brackets of the day. Our wake-sleep cycle is vital to our energy and mood. When we stretch these boundaries and are over or under-slept, we can experience shifts in mood and motivation. Sometimes these shifts are subtle, and other times we can get way off course. Commit to waking and retiring at set times. This is a time to cognitively override attractions or distractions and the rationalizations supporting the allure of staying up or sleeping in.

Routines. It's easy to brush off or postpone routines when each day has a similar "look" and tone. But just like our natural rhythms, we have motivational rhythms in getting things done, particularly the long list of "have-tos." Overriding distractions and procrastinations to stick with routines brings a sense of reward on the other side and frees us up to enjoy the "want-tos."

Connection. While it may look different at this time, we still need to feel connected. Putting this off till things get better can create other problems. Finding the energy to connect in creative ways may require us to override the natural grief and longing we have for "normal." Importantly, we need to regularly fill our cup with social connection.

Movement. With gyms closed and other venues off limits, we've been challenged to find new, different, and creative ways to keep movement a part of our day. Once again, overcoming inertia is the hardest part. Mentally talking yourself into moving requires overriding the lower energy state and its accompanying chatter. Once you're moving, notice how much better you feel.

Projects. Loosely defined here, "projects" are something bigger and beyond the day-to-day routines and responsibilities. Planning something to look forward to feeds optimism. It's no wonder that one of the biggest expenditures during the pandemic has been on home

improvement. But projects can be personal, from a wish list, or something you have been *meaning* to do. The key *is* meaning, something we all need during this time. And this represents the override needed to get started.

About the Author

John C. Panepinto, PsyD, LCMHCS, NCC, has worked in educational, clinical, and, private settings for over two decades. Presently, he balances roles as a consultant in early intervention, and as Clinical Psychologist for Carolina Developmental Pediatrics. He has maintained a private practice for over 20 years. Dr. Panepinto has written on parenting, development, emotional intelligence, resiliency, and performance psychology. He was the keynote speaker for the 2017 National Stay-At-Home Dad's convention, and blogs on fatherhood (AFathersPath.net) and performance psychology (AbovetheFieldofPlay.com). Find out more at DrJohnPanepinto.com.