

## **Breaking free from emails**

By Megan McDonough

Habits are hard to break. I'm trying to break the habit of starting my workday with emails. When I jump right into email, it leads to a day-long link to the computer. The laptop and I become conjoined twins. This is day two of my attempt to start my workday writing with old-fashioned pen and paper instead of new-fangled technology. I cheated. While getting the kids off to school, I snuck into the office and peeked at my inbox. OK, I confess I did more than peek. I also responded to a few emails, and that led to checking my blog, which led to me uploading a new video. Easing out of technology is like dieting - it's tough to eat less.

Just like cultivating a healthy eating habit, I'm back on track now, putting pen to paper--even though I feel pulled in the direction of gorging my email appetite.

Habits, I read somewhere, take daily practice over many weeks to become long-lasting. If the healthy eating habit is any indication, I'm a slow learner. I've worked many years to eat less since my maturing metabolism tells me I need less to maintain a certain weight. It's a habit I'm still working on.

I think it takes more than time to cultivate a new habit. It also takes tunnel vision. This same myopic view of the world came in handy when we took a family vacation to Alaska. The four of us enjoyed hiking but the terrain was very different than what we were used to in the Northeast. Here in New England, you have trees, making you feel secure as you ascend. You get glimpses of the vistas framed by maple or oaks. In Alaska, we hiked in alpine tundra. The views are breathtaking and vast. You can see for miles and miles all around for 360 degrees. This means you can also see below--leading to a dizzying sense of height. If the drop-off was steep, it was easy to become afraid. I noticed butterflies lifting my stomach into my throat on more than one occasion.

When Jonathan, my 10-year-old son, got nervous, my husband Joe had some good advice: look down at your feet while you walk on the path. This tunnel vision helps settle nerves. A myopic view blocked out distractions, focusing on one step at a time. Before we knew it, we were at the top of the mountain, feeling safe and secure at the broad-topped mountain, exhilarated by the accomplishment.

Joe's advice applies equally to developing new habits--keep your eyes focused on each step, and block out everything else.

This morning I looked around at the vistas and became momentarily distracted by emails from my newly developing habit of daily writing. When that view threatened to disorient me, I put my head down, and focused on this pen writing on paper.

Nothing else matters--not whether the writing is good or bad. It doesn't matter what, if anything, the writing will be used for, or whether anyone will read it, or if there is other work that needs to be done. This writing is the path I am walking, leading to some unknown vista.

Today, consider giving your full, undivided attention to the path before you in each given moment.

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