



The Holiday Oil Change.

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The normal chaos

We live in a world of constant busyness and chaos, our days filled with seemingly endless to-do lists and a never-ending string of activities. It can come to feel as though we are constantly rushing from one place to the next, and from one task to another. Balancing our various roles and responsibilities can also become more challenging when the demands placed on us seem to be constantly increasing. And so, we hold on by a thread for the occasional breakaway that pops up throughout the year and make that final push towards the December holidays in anticipation of a chance to catch our breath.

Peace and calm - The myth

Amidst the chaos, we seem to be in desperate need of some peace and calm to help us re-energise ourselves so that we may carry on. This is even more crucial when we add children into the mix. The question is, however, how do we even know what 'peace' and 'calm' really mean these days? Do we truly understand what it means to be calm, how to achieve this state, and how it is supposed to feel? We need to begin by reminding ourselves that 'calm' is so much more than just the absence of activity or busyness and that achieving this state fully can take a fair amount of effort in the beginning.

Do we truly understand what it means to be calm?





The great escape

For most of us, the ‘calm’ that we seek and seem to achieve is not actually calm, but instead, it ends up being just another activity we engage in which requires effort and energy. While we may regard calmness as being synonymous with escaping the chaos, the reality is that “being calm” and “wanting to escape” are two very different things, and it’s important that we understand the difference.

If we think about the idea of escaping, we might imagine something chasing or following us and getting closer, feeling a constant need to stay ahead and away from what’s coming. We could say that a certain level of anxiety or tension is associated with escaping. We need to be asking ourselves: *“am I escaping, or am I resting? What is this “escaping” reinforcing for me? What is my thinking pattern or what are the habits that lead me to feel like I need to escape? What are we teaching our children by escaping the chaos with them?”* Sadly, we can often end up feeding a negative thought cycle that can leave us exhausted even after a holiday, and we may dread going back to work or school, asking ourselves: *“did we even rest?”*

To ensure that we find the calm and rest we are seeking, we need to begin by first acknowledging just how busy we really are. Writing down all that is done or required in a day can be a scary but necessary task to see things clearly in black and white. Being able to prioritise activities or hand over responsibilities becomes easier through a practical activity such as this. We can then purposefully decide to put specific tasks and responsibilities on hold while we are away on holiday, and have peace of mind knowing that we don’t need to worry or think about them. Remind yourself that incorporating personal time into your schedule is not a luxury, but a necessity. Challenge yourself to be still with just your thoughts, gauge how comfortable this activity is (or isn’t), and then practice being able to sit with your thoughts without the need for distraction.

Constant connectivity

For many of us, getting away means still staying connected to everything – only from a different location. When we look specifically for holiday destinations that have WiFi included, we end up taking our entire life and our work with us on holiday. We remain connected to our emails and projects, and continue to manage our teams and tasks while sitting on the beach. While this may have some benefits, it can also be costly to our health and happiness, adversely affecting ourselves, our bodies, our minds, our families, and our relationships.

So, how can we make sure we break that constant connectivity for the better? We can start by trying to introduce boundaries and rules in the home that force us to disconnect. For example, we can turn off the WiFi during specific hours every night, or have each family member or resident place their mobile device in a box during family time. These strategies can be great for ensuring healthier, happier, and more connected households. However, it must also be noted that such initiatives are likely to be met with some contempt at first. Because technology has taken such a central position in the lives of children, teens, and tweens around the world today, they are likely to have difficulty understanding the reasoning behind such an initiative.

It could thus be helpful to introduce these ideas slowly (especially with teens and tweens) to allow them time to get comfortable with it, and it's also critical that you help them understand why it is important. Remember, they have grown up with technology in their hands and all around them, so this can be quite a difficult topic to unpack. Another benefit is that having these boundaries in place at home makes it that much easier to implement the initiative when you are away on holiday too.



The family oil change

Just as cars require regular services and oil changes, we and our families do too. You and your family require many things to be happy and to operate smoothly. There may be times when you find that things aren't running as smoothly as they should. Maybe there's some "smoke," or other warning signs, to indicate that things aren't working too well and that some attention is needed. Maybe you realise you've all made it to the end of the year, but there's a lot of tension and fighting. Or perhaps you and your child haven't spoken much, and your partner is stuck in the middle. When things aren't running smoothly, we need to take a moment to pause, "turn our engines off" – so to speak – and give ourselves and our relationships some attention.

Take time to try and establish what issues have developed over the months. When did these issues first come to light and have there been attempts to address them yet? Informal chats with your partner or your children can be very helpful in addressing these issues. It is also recommended that you ask them directly for some issues that they would like to be raised and addressed. The nature of the issues will vary greatly from one family to the next, depending on your family dynamics and personalities.

At the end of the day, communication is everything, and we need to remember that we can't address things that we haven't been made aware of. Help your children, partner, and other family members to feel safe and comfortable to share anything, even if it is not easy for you to hear. Developing our ability to [talk to our kids so they will listen](#) and understanding the different [love languages](#) of all family members can be the golden key to bringing about positive change.

The breakdown

When we push on and simply ignore the warning signs that we might be seeing in ourselves, our children, our partners, or our family as a whole, it can be incredibly damaging to us and our relationships. We need to ensure that we guard against reaching the point of breakdown because this can be very costly for us in both time and money. There are also some significant knock-on effects of having these 'breakdowns' that we may not consider, and many people might prefer to live in a state of ignorant bliss in this regard. When the eventual breakdown does occur,

they might seem surprised and be forced to deal with the aftermath of something which could have been avoided in the first place.

To prevent an eventual breakdown from happening, it can be beneficial to discuss possible warning signs with your family, why you each consider it to be a warning sign, and how each person thinks it should be addressed. It can be helpful to ask which issues are very serious and which are a little less serious. Equipping your family with the necessary skills and know-how for recognising when a 'warning light' comes on can ensure early intervention. Again, this requires safe, and open communication as far as possible. Allowing yourself (and the rest of the family) to put away all electronic devices and be fully present in the moment can help slow things down and be a valuable tool for avoiding an eventual breakdown. Try to "do less" by prioritising specific activities and being more selective about when you spend time on them.

Acta non verba (actions not words)

The family oil change is a hands-on activity that requires effort and input from all parties involved. It isn't something we can outsource for others to do, as we need to take ownership ourselves. When we take action, we teach our children to do the same. We can't expect children to practise self-care, manage their time well, or allow themselves to relax properly if they do not see their parents doing so. Parents are the primary source of social and emotional learning for children.

Although words are an important part of communication, actions and behaviours are far more powerful – especially within the context of family. It is not so much what we say to our children that matters, but rather how we act and behave in front of them and how we treat others. Within the context of the 'family oil change', we also need to teach our children how to pause, reflect, and take things in for a moment before acting impulsively or rushing on to the next task. We need to teach them how to appreciate the things we have in life and to make the most of every experience. The difficult part here might be that we need to teach ourselves, first. Most of us don't know how to do this, so we need to invest time and energy into practising the necessary skills and habits that will help us to get there. In doing so, we are already demonstrating the correct behaviour that our children need to see and learn from. Live the behaviour you want your children to develop and it will happen. As the common phrase goes, "monkey see monkey do."

Practical steps for a “family oil change”

The holiday season is the perfect time to stop and “check the oil.” It is during this time that things seem to slow down a little bit and when we typically spend the most time with family. It is during this time that we must become conscious of the difference between escaping and relaxing. If we carry on with our regular habits and holiday routines, it is rather possible that we may continue to try and escape the chaos, and that we might return home still feeling exhausted and not so ready for the new year.

Listed below are some practical steps that can help you and your family implement the changes you’d like to see:

- **Calm** – Find time to purposefully seek calm. This should be a priority for you, your partner, and your children
- **Disconnect** – The holiday time is a time to disconnect so that we can reconnect. Reconnecting with loved ones can happen through verbal conversations and also through the various actions and behaviours that allow us to demonstrate that we are being present and attentive
- **Be purposeful** – It does take some planning and preparation to achieve a state of full relaxation, so plan ahead, and drop ideas and thoughts into the conversations at home. That way, your family will become more accustomed to the idea of talking, sharing and connecting on the topic. If it has been a while since you last “changed the oil,” don’t expect it to be simple and straightforward – just keep your eyes on what you are working towards
- **Talk less, do more** – Demonstrate to your children how to communicate, reflect, appreciate the little things, and clear the clutter from their lives
- **Relax and reflect** – Take this time to relax and enjoy each other as you discuss and refuel for the year ahead. Learn from the good and the bad – the achievements and the failures – that took place this year. You cannot change what has happened, but you can change what you take away from those experiences

By following these steps, you can gain perspective, reflect, accept, and grow to embrace what lies ahead – and in the process, you can inspire your loved ones to do the same. Most importantly, remember to enjoy the journey!



The office oil change

If you are employed full-time, chances are you're spending most of your waking hours at work. That means that if you're unhappy at work, you're not enjoying yourself for most of your day. If that's the case, it might be time to consider an office oil check – or change.

Below are some practical tips for performing an office oil change:

- **Create a good daily routine** – Make sure you allocate specific times to non-work-related activities such as family time, relaxation, cooking, hobbies, and physical exercise
- **Take your breaks seriously** – This applies both to the short breaks you take throughout your work day and the breakaways or vacations you go on when you're out of the office. Don't cancel them or cut them short for the sake of meeting deadlines, your rest is vital
- **Nurture your connections** – Your colleagues form your main support system at work, so make time to check in with them, ask them how they're doing, and offer support when they're struggling. When we're stressed or under a lot of pressure at work, our colleagues are the ones that can help us feel better, that can support us and can lend a helping hand when we're feeling overwhelmed

- **Set clear boundaries** – Keeping everyone happy can be exhausting, which is why we should be able to clearly define our boundaries, communicate them to others simply, and reinforce why they are important to us
- **Re-align your purpose and readjust your focus** – Reflect on the victories and mistakes of the past year, think about what you would like to do differently this year, and think about how your actions over the next few months could get you closer to your life's purpose

When it comes to our health and happiness, our career and level of job satisfaction play a huge role. We need to use this time away from the office, not to escape a bad situation, but to build towards creating a better one for ourselves in the new year.

Reflections

The New Year Oil Change can improve the quality of our relationships, the enjoyability of our everyday lives, and the quality of our rest time. It is an opportunity to stop, reflect, and draw on the strengths that already reside within us to build a life for ourselves and a home for our loved ones that will allow us to thrive.



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