

Smarter Living

# 4 Reasons We're Frazzled at Work

Identify your attachment style and take control of your time.

By ELIZABETH GRACE SAUNDERS

Your better mind knows exactly how to manage your time better at work but a primal, seemingly uncontrollable urge to do the opposite overtakes you.

You know you should say no when you're asked to take on that new project, but you say yes. Or you know your boss said your report was good enough, but you work until midnight perfecting it. Or you're just stuck — wanting to do better but unsure that trying will help — so you do nothing.

If you are frustrated with your seemingly irrational behavior, the root issue may be deep subconscious programming known as your "attachment style." Your attachment style dictates how you relate to other people, particularly in situations that trigger stress.

Attachment style discussions typically arise in relation to the bond between parents and children or romantic partners, but in my work as a time management coach, I've seen that individuals can also "attach" differently in the workplace. Here's how to identify your attachment style, and take control of how you manage your time.

## Anxious Preoccupied Attachment

A fear of upsetting others drives individuals with an anxious preoccupied attachment style. This fear-based approach leads to counterproductive behaviors — for example, struggling with a compulsion to check email incessantly to make sure everything is "O.K."

**HOW TO TELL IF THIS IS YOU** If you operate from an anxious attachment style, you will have at least two major time management struggles. The first is that your attention will get hijacked whenever you experience a perceived "threat." You will feel negative bias — the email from the client must be a complaint and the lack of acknowledgment from the boss means she is already looking for my replacement. Although these thoughts may be true, they likely are not. But your anxious brain jumps to negative conclusions and gets obsessed with issues until they are resolved.

The second time management issue is a severe allergy to setting boundaries. The idea of saying no may terrify you.

**WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT** To improve your time management, you'll need to calm your nervous system to get out of fight-or-flight mode every time something happens at work.

The best calming strategies include positive self-talk and peer support. In terms of self-talk, it may sound something like "Let's wait and see what happens" or "Everything will be O.K." If you still feel agitated, you may need to ask for support to get clearheaded enough to move forward. That could mean addressing the situation directly with a client or colleague or talking to an outside person for reassurance.

And when it comes to setting boundaries, you can start with something subtle like staying off email after you leave the office. That way you don't need to say, "No, I can't do this tonight." You simply don't know about the assignment until the next day.

## Dismissive Avoidant Attachment

Individuals with dismissive avoidant attachment at work tend to think they are smart and everyone else is stupid. Well, maybe not exactly stupid, but definitely not as smart as they are. They most likely decide what they should do and then ignore what others want. This leads to conflict and mistrust. This mistrust can lead to others attempting to micromanage and monitor them, which just makes them more annoyed and more likely to dismiss input.

**HOW TO TELL IF THIS IS YOU** For those around you, your biggest time management issue is most likely that you miss deadlines and don't do the work that they consider most important.

From your perspective, the biggest time management issue tends to be working late. Long hours usually arise when you get fixated on doing a particular project really well. Or they can happen because you want to work on what you consider to be important first and then you also have to complete work for others.

**WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT** To make a change, you need to start by acknowledging that other people may have a point. You may not agree with their stated priorities, you may think you know better, and you may even think that the work is stupid.

But if you want to achieve greater success, have people micromanage you

less and work fewer hours, there will be times when you are better off listening to and doing what other people say. To make this shift, you may need to consciously work on your emotional intelligence, including recognizing that an idea different from yours is not necessarily wrong and that there is value in working harmoniously with others.

## Fearful Avoidant Attachment

"Stuck" is the best word to describe those with a fearful avoidant attachment style. They have the fear of those with anxious attachment without the confidence that they can make things right. Someone with anxious attachment would quickly open a potentially "threatening" email and reply to it as quickly as possible to avert danger. Someone with a fearful avoidant attachment style would see the email, freak out about it and then never open it. Never reading the email creates a compounding paralyzing dread. They fear bad outcomes so strongly they never discover if the email from a client was simply an FYI. or a full-out tirade.

They don't trust themselves or the system, so there is an undercurrent of "why even try?" in their day-to-day work.

**HOW TO TELL IF THIS IS YOU** You tend to spend most of your time in a state of being overwhelmed because you fear everything and feel very little power to do anything about your fears (much less the work that is also piling up).

This leads to your trying to avoid all of it and escape, get lost in social media, try organizing and reorganizing your desk, and perpetually think about how to explain why your work isn't done.

**WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT** If you fall into this pattern, you'll need a two-prong strategy. The first involves reducing your fear response. Try some of the calming strategies we suggested for people who have an anxious attachment style, such as positive self-talk and support from colleagues or friends.

Then you will need to take gentle action to get your work done. Set some goals for yourself. It may start with opening one email a day that scares you, or with working just 15 minutes on a project you have avoided for weeks — or longer. Small bits of progress where you realize you can do something and it didn't kill you lead to greater success later.

## Secure Attachment

Those with a secure attachment style at work take tasks as they come, do what they can and address issues that come up easily. They work hard and do not fear saying no when they feel they need to. They know they are capable, and they are confident that others will respond well to them.

**HOW TO TELL IF THIS IS YOU** You generally fare best when it comes to managing your time. You are comfortable prioritizing tasks and asking for help when you need it. You also feel comfortable

setting healthy boundaries and pushing back when necessary, and you do not often engage in fear-based behavior.

**WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT** If you have a secure attachment style at work, you are most likely managing your time well and achieving good work-life balance. Stay secure but be aware. Regularly ask for direct feedback so if there is something that you need to work on, you can make changes. Also, if you notice something seems really off, for example a big downgrade in the quality of communication with your manager, don't dismiss it as, "Oh, she is just stressed." Do a quick follow-up either in person or via email, saying: "I noticed that we're not communicating as well as in the past. Is there anything I've done that's contributed to that shift?"

Although attachment style is not the only factor influencing your time management, it may play a significant role, particularly if you find yourself repeatedly compelled to act against what you "know" to do. As with attachment style in your personal life, attachment style at work can vary based on situation or circumstance. In one job or with one particular person or project, you may have an anxious attachment style, and in another circumstance, you may display more secure characteristics. Wherever you find yourself, improving how you manage your time starts with identifying what kind of attachment style you have and then taking steps to address it.



ROSE WONG

# Lose 100 Pounds? Run 20 Miles a Week? Get Real

By NUSHRAT RAHMAN

Setting New Year's resolutions can be a daunting task, and even more so when statistics say that a vast majority of us fail in our attempts. But choosing the right goals and creating a solid plan can keep you on track.

I talked to Tim Herrera, editor of Smarter Living, the Times section that helps readers live a better, more fulfilling life, about goal setting, habit-building and the importance of carving out time for laziness.

## Why do we all seem to set goals around this time in the first place?

It's an arbitrary resetting date. From a practical sense, it doesn't really mean anything. It's kind of silly, but I think any time that gives us a convenient excuse to re-evaluate where we are in life is great.

**A lot of people live by their planners, like I do. Throughout the year, I use Sunday to figure out what I'm going to do for the rest of the week. So, on a larger scale, doing that for the next year can be helpful, too.**

Right. One of the weird things about adulthood is that after you graduate from college, you never really have another stage where you, and everyone around you, are evaluating things in life. There's never a collective occasion to set a goal, but New Year's provides a very convenient excuse to have those conversations with yourself and people you know. Everyone likes to trash New Year's and talk about how silly resolutions are, but for a lot of people it does help. Whatever works is great.

## What would you say are the best ways to set goals?

I think it's important to recognize a couple of reasons we fail at goals in the first place, because I think the answer to setting good goals is buried in that. We usually set one or two goals, neither of which has a very good chance of success.



GEORGE WYLESOL

You might be setting goals that are completely unreasonable and unattainable. These are the kinds of goals that even in the absolute best conditions and best-case scenarios, you're not going to achieve. For example: Wanting to lose 100 pounds or write a book are both great resolutions, but are they realistic? Setting unreasonable goals is a simple way of setting yourself up for failure.

The other way we set ourselves up for failure is by trying to have goals that we don't really believe in. A lot of the time, these take the form of goals that we think society says we should set, like trying to run 20 miles a week. I think being really, really honest and realistic

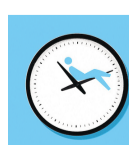
with ourselves about the goals we're setting is the best thing we can do to actually succeed. Once we have the ideas in mind about what we want to achieve, change or quit, there are practical steps you can take within that goal to maximize your chances for success.

One method I've heard a lot about is Smart goals, which stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound.

**Smart goals are great because they break down your goals — which often can seem so massive and unachievable — into bite-size pieces. I'm always very lofty with my goal setting and one thing I've tried and found really beneficial is having an accountability buddy.**

Having that kind of support system is very important: friends and people in your life who are going to call you out when you're slacking or reach out to you when you're not feeling great. But there are a lot of things that you can do internally to help you stay motivated. One is being really accepting of your-

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inbox at [nytimes.com/SLnewsletter](mailto:nytimes.com/SLnewsletter).

## Tip of the Week \*

### How to combat the back-to-work anxiety of the 'Sunday Scaries.'

As Maroon 5 famously crooned, "Sunday morning, rain is falling, steal some covers, share some skin." It's a solid plan for the second weekend day until you look at the clock and realize Monday is coming. The ensuing anxiety has been cleverly called the "Sunday Scaries," and yes, it's a real thing. Just ask Twitter.

Such scaries are triggered by anticipating the end of our precious, limited free time and soon having to tackle the responsibilities of the week ahead, according to New York-based psychologist Melissa Robinson-Brown. These anxieties are heightened for people who are unhappy in their jobs, so intensely feeling Sunday Scaries is a good reminder to check in with yourself and where you're at with your career.

That said, Sunday Scaries can just as easily happen to people who are happy with their jobs. It's a type of low-level, background anxiety that can hit anyone as Sunday afternoon sunlight recedes behind the horizon.

To combat the Sunday Scaries, plan an enjoyable (preferably offline) activity or outing, whether it's as simple as taking a walk or reading a good book, and if it helps you unwind, leave the phone at home. Staying mindful about what's happening around you will distract you from anxious thoughts about tomorrow.

As the day winds down, set intentions and goals — professionally and in your personal life — for the week. These will help you regain control of your worries and look forward to conquering the week rather than fearing it. *KATHLEEN WONG*