

PUBLICATION

The Power of Ritual

Authors: Caldwell G. Collins

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If you ask my mother, anything can be cured by a nice hot bath. Growing up, I watched her prioritize this nightly "NHB" no matter what was going on around her, but especially when her plate was overflowing with work, caring for elderly parents, and keeping my brother and me in line.

Now that I have my own very full plate, I get it. It was her ritual.

We were all stretched thin before the pandemic, and despite our best intentions to return with lighter loads, the commitment surplus is not letting go. To the contrary: Time away from each other has made us more determined to squeeze the last drop out of every day. And while the grind is not new, it feels like we have put an exclamation point on overload, with offices and schools still closing, staffing shortages all over the country, and everything from restaurant reservations to summer camp registration becoming a Taylor Swift ticket drop. I've had to alter the way I cope with the chaos by taking a page out of Mom's book.

This change was borne of necessity: I work early in the morning so I can have time with my family while we prepare for the day. That means getting up when the house is dark and silent. I creep downstairs, my dog and cat at my heels. I make tea and they get a snack. They dutifully follow me to my desk where I light a candle, and my cat curls up in my lap. I type, she purrs. We don't move until I hear a kid's door open. One day, it dawned on me that this was *our* ritual, and I started to look forward to it (as much as you can look forward to a time in the morning that begins with a 4). I began to see my current routines in a new light.

My rituals are ordinary things: a pre-dawn cup of loose-leaf tea, candles that change with the seasons, a selection of jazz while checking email, the hot sauce in my desk (that might make an appearance at client meetings), 5 minutes of crossword puzzles with my husband while I put on my favorite apron to make dinner, the handful of songs I sing to my kids at bedtime, tea (a different one this time) right before bed. There is nothing unique about these moments. It is the way I now treat them that has made a difference: with intention and gratitude for the spark in my day. My shift in attitude has elevated them to a reliable source of comfort on days that feel unpredictable.

Investing in your routines is an easy and sustainable resolution for 2023. The mundane nature is what makes them great because you're already doing them, and they don't depend on newfound free time. Allow your ordinary to become a source of joy: Be persnickety in your choices and guard the seconds you have to yourself. Maybe it will take a good day to a new level, or maybe it will provide stability during a tough stretch. For me, transforming routines into rituals has been a small investment with big returns.

It is fun to watch it ripple into those around me. Just last night, my daughter put her head in my lap, anxious to the hilt about an upcoming play audition. After we talked through ways to prepare and feel good about her song, she looked at me and said, "I think I might just need a cup of tea." I smiled and thought, yes, that could work ... that, and maybe a nice hot bath.