

## BALANCING TOMORROW, TODAY™

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**H**ave you ever wished your weekend would last forever? Do you ever dread Monday mornings...or Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings? Sometimes work life can become so mundane that you'd rather be anywhere else than at your job. If you have ever felt like you are going insane at work, then read on. Today we're going to take a look at how the metaphor of spring's rural mud season can help us understand how our jobs sometimes make us crazy with boredom as we balance tomorrow's *sanity*, today – at work.

As spring's rural roads dry out and the hope of spring is in the air, even the most engaged employee can get a little cabin fever and long for something more than the same old routine. Whether you desperately need a change of pace, or you're just looking for a little spice in your work life, there are a few simple lessons we can learn from, you guessed it... mud.

In my last column we looked at the two main principles of driving in mud season:

1. Pick a rut and stick to it
2. Don't ever stop.

Today we're going to look at how these principles affect our sanity at work.

I'm sure you'll find that we all have a tendency to "pick a rut and stick to it" at work. Our "ruts," however, are not all the same. Some of us find great comfort in routine, in knowing what is expected of us and exactly how to achieve those expectations each and every time. Others find fulfillment by facing new challenges and having to figure out how to achieve the desired results each time. No matter which profile fits you, it is important to deviate from your normal routine every now and then for long-term mental health.

Oddly enough, creating a little insanity in today's work life can make tomorrow's experience on the job a lot saner! When you drive out of your rut at work, so to speak, you challenge yourself in a new way. This challenge keeps your mind agile. The excitement of the unknown, associated with this challenge, gives your blood chemistry a boost which is good for the long-term health of your body. All of these effects add up to an increased level of long-term sanity on the job. It seems that the slip-sliding, bump-riding you experience when changing ruts on a rural road during mud season may be just what you need to wash away today's workplace doldrums and pave the way for a saner tomorrow.

Our second mud driving principle is "never stop." In the workplace, it always seems that stopping is the worst thing imaginable. Stopping is associated with laziness, inefficiency, loss of productivity and profit. Why is stopping, as in our mud driving metaphor, perceived so negatively? Unlike driving on a dirt road during mud season, an employee who stops is not going to sink into the depths of your organization's muck and mire.

Stopping at work—taking some time to think about your actions, your role, and your responsibilities—can give you a chance to determine if you are on the right job or career path. It can also offer you an opportunity to see if you are taking advantage of all of your abilities in your work life. Taking time to stop and make some changes can keep your work life interesting and compelling for days and years to come.

So here is how you can start balancing tomorrow's sanity, today – at work:

- Find a problem at work, even if it is not in your area, and try solving it. It will challenge your mind and won't hurt your boss any either! (Make sure you don't sacrifice your regular responsibilities, of course.)
- Try changing your routine, even if your tasks don't change—do things out of order or in a creative way. (Make sure you keep your effectiveness in mind, too)
- Set aside some time each week, month, and year to think about your work life. Are you taking responsibility for tomorrow's sanity, today? Make sure you look for opportunities to challenge yourself. You'll be surprised how great mastering something new feels!
- Assess your job/career direction periodically. An important part of keeping sane at work is to continuously check with yourself to make sure you are using your abilities, challenging your self, and that you feel good about your work. If you find you are not on the right path, first check your attitude, expectations, and communication with your employer. Many times we realize that it is not our job that needs retooling, but just the way we work it. If it is time for a new job or career, make sure you consider your long-term sanity and don't make a job jump today without thoroughly considering tomorrow!

Remember, balance is a process...not a destination. *If you'd like to get some ideas about balancing a specific area of life, work, or your organization, e-mail me I'll take a crack at it. As always, all correspondence will be kept confidential.* Thanks to those who have already sent your requests in!

Dr. Stacie Morgan is the author of **Professional Strategy in a New York Minute**. How to get the right job, the right promotion, the right pay, and the right respect (New Strategy Press). For more information visit her website at [www.balancedmanagement.com](http://www.balancedmanagement.com) or e-mail her at [stacie@balancedmanagement.com](mailto:stacie@balancedmanagement.com).