

# Slow down, branch out

Beat the midyear workplace blues with these tricks to make time fly, writes **Sue White**.

**B**oo to August. It's still cold, the last time you had a holiday was – gosh, when was it? – and you're lacking in motivation to head to work five days a week. Here are some tips to help you go the distance until Christmas.

## Take a break

According to the statistics, Australians are leave hogs.

With 123 million days of accumulated annual leave between us, there's no reason not to take a break when we need it.

"We used to be the land of the long weekend but we've lost the holiday habit," the managing director of tourism Australia, Andrew McEvoy, says. He says it's easy to risk burnout if you don't schedule regular time off.

"Six in 10 visits to the doctor are stress related," he says.

McEvoy recommends planning four mini-breaks a year, plus one big break to really look forward to. Taking Thursday to Monday off is ideal but even a four-day weekend will pay dividends.

Naturally, McEvoy wants you to use your short breaks for travelling in Australia.

"It's good for our health and the Australian economy as well," he says.

## Reward the energisers

Bosses desperate to keep staff motivated until Christmas should

use reward and recognition wisely.

"Be clear about the type of behaviour you want staff to display and when you see it, recognise it publicly," the chief executive of Power2Motivate, Ben Thompson, says.

He suggests refreshing the reward programs often.

"Try to break them down into short periods by having a 'beat the winter blues' theme or an 'energy' theme for a couple of months," Thompson says.

"The person who comes up with the best idea to get people moving will get something special."

## Learn from the experts

Being from Britain, Jocelyn Hunter from Bench PR knows full well what it's like to be desperate for summer to arrive.

"Winter only lasts three months here, not six like in the UK," she says.

Events and incentives can help staff stay positive.

"Short-term goals are key – offer financial incentives or rewards if those goals are met," she says.

Hunter prefers holding performance appraisals quarterly, rather than annually, to keep motivation up. She says celebrating achievements is vital.

"We turned three recently, so we had a party to celebrate at a bar in Melbourne's CBD," she says.



up a hobby can be beneficial. Photo: Getty Images

Compared with Britain, Aussie employers are less likely to allow staff to work from home but Hunter recommends bosses relax on this front.

"Working one day a week or fortnight at home when it's cold, wet and miserable outside will help staff keep motivated," she says.

## Invest your creative energy in something with a long-term pay-off.

### Learn something fun

Rather than concocting a yarn to earn another day in bed ("I think I have that bug going around"), invest your creative energy in something with a longer-term pay-off. A short course at your local community college can be a cheap, cheery way to beat midyear blues.

If you want something work-related, there's still time this year to conquer Creative Suite or understand the ins and outs of online marketing. However, you

may prefer something for the soul instead: try tap dancing, a chocolate workshop or brush up on your dragon-boating techniques.

The manager of the short-course program at Sydney Community College, Karin Waldmann, says: "When it's cold, there's a tendency to do more indoor options. In spring, our swimming starts to book out and boating, biking and horseriding become very popular."

For information on Sydney Community College, see [ofcourseyoucan.com.au](http://ofcourseyoucan.com.au). There are no set term times.

Also, for Melbourne's Centre for Adult Education, see [cae.edu.au](http://cae.edu.au). Term four starts September 17.

### Stay well

Investing time in good food and exercise may feel like hard slog in winter but for nutritionist and naturopath Sam Beau Patrick from Health Queen, staying healthy should be a focus year round.

She says those who succeed at these goals put the time into preparation: "In winter, many people crave warm comfort foods,

which often end up being unhealthy. Instead, make a big bowl of vegetable soup on the weekend and take it into work for those moments when you want to have junk."

If you're pressed for time, Patrick says cooking in batches is a realistic way to eat well.

"Pick three or four nights a week you'll cook and then live off leftovers the rest of the week," she says.

Buying at your local farmers' market helps, too.

"You'll be buying seasonally so it'll last a lot longer in the fridge."

Short days shouldn't be an excuse not to exercise.

"Carry your sneakers everywhere," Patrick says.

"Sometimes we get a 10- to 15-minute pocket and if your sneakers are there, you're more likely to do it."

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