Independent Banker  
February 2023  
Portfolio

[tag] Leadership at All Levels

[hed] Fighting the February lull

[body]

The nights are still long and spring hasn’t yet sprung, so don’t blame yourself if you’re feeling sluggish. But how do you keep productivity up when your workload is showing no signs of hibernating? The theme for next month’s ICBA LIVE is “Light the Fire. Light the Way.” So, with that in mind, here are 12 ways to light up your February and find your focus.

1. **Eliminate distractions**. Studies suggest we’re constantly distracted by our devices, so make a point of hiding your phone in a desk drawer or turning off notifications. Switch off Microsoft Teams, make your inbox disappear and close your browser.
2. **Make a to-do list**. If it’s daunting, break it down into smaller chunks for the day—or even the hour—ahead. End the day by mapping out tomorrow’s list.
3. **Prioritize**. Not everything on your list is urgent. Tackle the most important work first.
4. **Break it up**. If a project is labor intensive, divide it into smaller sections. Outline a plan, establish deadlines and check each piece off as you progress.
5. **Schedule focus time**. Research has shown it can take an average of 23 minutes to refocus on a task after you’ve been interrupted, so carve out some dedicated work time. Consider using tools like Microsoft Viva Insights to help. And listen to the natural reactions of your mind and body, scheduling focus time when you perform best.
6. **Manage the noise**. Some of us like perfect silence. Others prefer classical music or even white noise. Wear noise-canceling headphones or crank up some Mozart—whatever works for you.
7. **Keep a distraction notebook**. When an idea pops into your head or you remember something you might forget again, write it down and don’t let it cloud your focus time.
8. **Take breaks**. Scheduling a full day of focus time isn’t healthy either. Listen to your body and beat the fatigue by giving yourself breaks to stand, stretch and eat.
9. **Look up**. Your mind can start to blur, so look away from the screen from time to time. Follow the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, take 20 seconds to stare at something 20 feet away.
10. **Change the scenery**. Use a conference room instead of your desk or find a quiet spot in a neighboring department. Changing your environment can trigger productivity.
11. **Take a productivity challenge**. If you know a colleague has deadline as well, set a friendly challenge to get past your respective roadblocks. You can even schedule lunch at the end of it to make it more appetizing.
12. **Don’t forget to sleep**. While it may be tempting, this isn’t an excuse to nap at work! Instead, invest in healthy slumber habits. A well-rested mind will help you dig in and get that work done.

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