

Eliminating Energy Drains

Henry James once said that there is nothing so fatiguing as the hanging on of an uncompleted task. This week, I proved him right . . . again. My pile of energy drains -- the undone things that I carry around every day -- had gotten very big and very heavy. Even when I wasn't thinking about them, they lurked below the surface making me feel stressed and anxious. The longer I put off doing something about them, the heavier they got and the more impossible they seemed. That's no surprise, right? You're probably dutifully carrying around your own pile of energy drains right now.

Relief comes when you finally get fed up (and brave) enough to do something about them. And here's the good surprise: it's easy. Compared with the months of unease and dread and guilt churned up by *not doing* something, actually *doing* it is a breeze.

Here's an example. For almost two months, I put off helping a friend who had gotten a foreclosure notice. My initial attempts hadn't get anywhere, and I didn't know what to do next. So I did nothing. I'd wake up in the night in a cold sweat, and then the next day I'd do nothing . . . again. I tried not to think about it. I used up a whole lot of energy doing nothing, until finally one day I couldn't stand it anymore. I made a strong cup of coffee and sat down at my desk and opened the file. I didn't know if I would get anywhere, but at least I showed up. (As the AA folks say, suit up and show up.) I took one small step after another, and in two days it was done. Over. No more waking up in the middle of the night. No more imagining my friend out on the street. Just sweet relief.

“No unwelcome tasks become any less unwelcome by putting them off till tomorrow. . . . Undone, they stand threatening and disturbing our tranquility and hindering our communion with God. If there be lying before you any bit of work from which you shrink, go straight up to it and do it at once.” Alexander Maclaren