

# I GUESS THAT'S WHY THEY CALL IT THE (SUNDAY NIGHT) BLUES

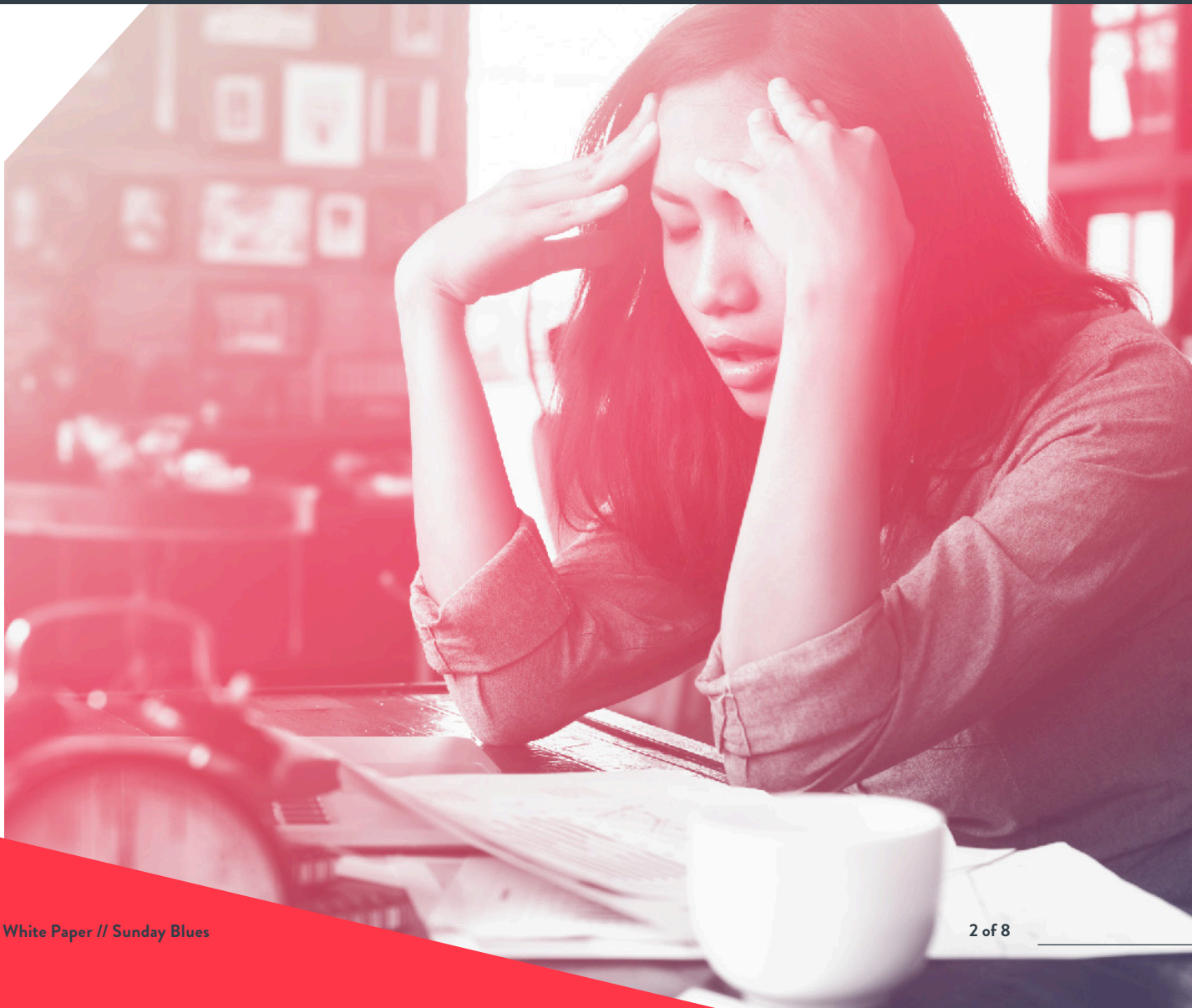


**SUNDAY NIGHT BLUES ARE NOT A NEW PHENOMENON**, although in recent years they've worn aliases like "Smonday" and the "Sunday scaries." Every week, 76% of Americans suffer from the Sunday night blues (Monster, 2015). For perspective, compare that to the 6.9% of the U.S. population (National Institute of Mental Health, 2017) who experienced a major depressive episode in 2016, and the anxiety disorders that affect 18.1% of U.S. adults every year (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2017).

So, what are the Sunday night blues? Sunday night blues can sometimes be tied to specific, isolated situations. For example, if you have a big presentation early in the week, or if your company is going through lay-offs, or if there's some other very specific event going on in your workplace, you may be more stressed and anxious than usual as the weekend comes to a close. These feelings are more sporadic, and it's usually fairly easy to identify the stressor.

But then there are the more "chronic" Sunday night blues, where every Sunday night brings up the same feeling of dread in anticipation of Monday morning. And this is no exaggeration or imaginary mental issue. According to Dr. Susanne Cooperman, neuropsychologist and psychoanalyst at NYU Langone Health, anticipatory anxiety about the week ahead triggers the release of adrenaline and cortisol from adrenal glands above the kidneys, causing you to experience a genuine stress reaction (Pandise, 2017).

**WHEN SOMETHING REGULARLY TAKES A TOLL ON THREE-QUARTERS OF THE POPULATION, IT'S TIME TO INVESTIGATE AND PONDER SOME SOLUTIONS.**



## WHY SO BLUE?

As the 2017 Stress in America survey reveals, 61% of workers view their jobs as a significant source of stress (American Psychological Association, 2017). The cause of job stress varies by person, but typically, the causes of Sunday night blues and related job stress break down into a few main categories.

### 1. Help...I'm not the blue-eyed boy

If you feel overwhelmed by your workload, your Sunday night blues may be caused by feelings of incompetence. Your inability to actually do your job and execute on necessary tasks will cause stress. If you are consistently struggling at work, and you don't have the development resources you need to learn and get better at your job, you are more likely to stress over your performance and possibly even suffer from imposter syndrome (Wilding, 2017). Not many people can pull off what Frank Abagnale, Jr. did, taking on multiple identities across various complicated careers (Solon, 2017). For most people, even faking a skill like being good at Excel spreadsheets is a recipe for disaster.

### 2. Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea

If you feel resigned and frustrated at the thought of going back to work on Monday, you may feel dissatisfied with your job. Of course, "dissatisfied" could fall somewhere on the spectrum from "mildly unhappy" to completely loathing everything about your office, from the smell of the air freshener to the sound of your cubemate chewing gum.

Feeling unfulfilled in your current position – whether that's because the work is not challenging enough, you're having issues with a coworker, or you feel that your boss undervalues you – can lead to extreme Sunday night frustration. Going back to work should not feel like a prison sentence!

### 3. I need a BFFAW

Do Sunday nights give you a sense of impending loneliness? If so, it's possible you are missing out on critical friendships at work. The Friendship Effect, the result of a series of studies by Evolv, suggests that having friendships at work also has a significant impact on workforce profitability, employee attrition, and productivity (Meyerle, 2012). Conversely, employees who do not have a workplace BFF are more likely to turnover and exhibit poorer performance.

In the simplest terms, for those people who look forward to coffee in the morning with a coworker to catch up on the weekend, or lunch plans with their team full of witty banter and jokes, Monday just doesn't seem so unbearable.



#### 4. From mellow to hello Monday

We're not Westworld hosts (at least, we don't think we are!) – we can't just turn our emotions and our thoughts on and off at will. Most of us require at least some time and space not only to decompress, but also to build our energy back up again.

Even machines sometimes need to reset. Think about your car in the winter – it doesn't warm up immediately or shut down cold as soon as you turn it off.

Humans are not so different. We don't immediately shut off when we walk out of the office, even if we're heading out for a couple days of PTO. And coming back to work from a vacation is twice as difficult. You're not fully in vacation mode through the end of your time off; usually, you go through stages of accepting that you must return to work (Viventium, 2018). It starts to hit you on the last day (or maybe earlier!) and you spend the rest of the time mentally preparing to go back to work.

If you experience Sunday night blues, every weekend likely feels like a smaller version of the vacation phenomenon.

#### 5. When skies are blue – is it me?

Sometimes, the weight of Sunday night blues might result more from internal conflicts than external problems.

Take a step back and think about your situation honestly. The truth is, everything in life is stressful. But if you take your work drama home with you, and vice versa, the resulting blend becomes toxic and mentally draining.

So, if you're continuously focused on everything in your life that contributes to your stress, you will only see the world as stressful.

**“WE CAN'T JUST TURN OUR EMOTIONS AND OUR THOUGHTS ON AND OFF AT WILL.”**

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## WHAT TO DO INSTEAD OF ALL THAT MONDAY MORNING QUARTERBACKING

So, you've admitted to having the Sunday night blues, and you've identified your stressor (or stressors). Now what? It boils down to two choices: wallow in the Sunday night blues misery or do something to change it.

### **“YOU WANT TO CHANGE IT? GREAT! SAVE SUNDAY NIGHTS!”**

For those blue-eyed boys who are facing a skill gap, you should engage in learning at work in order to improve your skills – and you shouldn't be afraid to ask for help when you find yourself stuck.

If you find yourself caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, address your desire for a new challenge with your manager. Don't put off difficult conversations with challenging relationships in the workplace.

For those of you needing a BFFAW, try to meet someone new at work and make an effort to get to know them before writing off the workplace culture.

Going from mellow to hello Monday makes it possible to achieve work-life balance if you set expectations with your manager and co-workers before getting those precious weekend days off. Be clear on what they can expect to see done by when each week.



## Address the real issue

If none of those tactics work and you are no longer aligned with the mission of the company and your team, it might be time to start looking for opportunities elsewhere. Think about your priorities as you seek to renovate your career (Molinsky, 2017).

On the flip side, if “it’s not the job, it’s you,” there are several steps you can take to help you, well, help you.

“Remember that the fun does not need to be over once you go back to work on Monday,” says Marni Neuburger, LCSW, an EMDR certified psychotherapist and SEP. “Monday is just like any other day of the week. If you enjoy your job and like the environment, notice that you will be surrounded by co-workers and it will be like any other day of the week. Remind yourself to be present in the moment.”

### NEUBURGER SUGGESTS THE FOLLOWING SIMPLE STRATEGIES FOR CHANGING YOUR ROUTINE AND CURBING THOSE SUNDAY NIGHT BLUES:

- Plug into a meditation app on your smart phone, such as Insight Timer or Calm. They have many choices to help ease your mind and body.
- Take a Sunday afternoon or evening restorative yoga class.
- Go for a walk with your family or friends.
- Find a Netflix show that you can look forward to and watch every Sunday evening.

“If your mind and body continue to feel the stress of Monday morning, this may be an indication of a deeper issue and you may want to consider speaking with a therapist to explore from where this anxiety is coming,” Neuburger says.

You might also want to work on your compartmentalizing skills. Compartmentalizing is often considered a defense mechanism, but in practice a little bit of compartmentalizing can help your stress management. Busy entrepreneurs use the tactic in a healthy way to focus only on what is in front of them, one thing at a time (Blair, 2012). All their energy in the moment is directed at only one task.

This way, you can focus your Sunday night energy on enjoying the last piece of the weekend rather than worrying about the next morning.

## HOW COMPANIES CAN HELP

While it may seem like finding a solution to the Sunday night blues falls most directly on the employee, companies also have some responsibility. After all, as a recent Global Corporate Challenge Insights report revealed, engaged employees are more productive at work – and disengaged employees are costing U.S. companies up to \$550 billion a year (Smith, 2016).

While there's no cure-all, there are a few things companies can do to help.

**“ON A LARGE SCALE, COMPANIES NEED TO STRIVE TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, AND ONE WAY TO DO SO IS TO PRIORITIZE A CULTURE OF HEALTH.”**

As simple as this sounds, leaders within an organization need to ask themselves, “do I suffer from Sunday night blues?” If the answer is yes, Houston, we have a problem. While some may suggest surveys as a way of gauging overall engagement, companies can rely on their managers and train them on identifying Sunday night blues symptoms. Since ignoring the behavior will not only exacerbate the problem, but also spread it, managers need to have heart-to-heart conversations with suffering employees.

Sometimes you need to sweat the small stuff too – things like not scheduling an important meeting at 9:00 am on Monday if you can help it, or not dumping an enormous project on someone Friday afternoon, will have an impact.

The real Sunday Fundays begin when you take action to change Sunday night blues into Sunday blue skies.

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