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How to beat the winter blues

Experts offer ways to warm up your business or career

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The cold darkness of winter can sink workers into a bluesy depression.

Achieving anything can prove difficult if you are uninspired, overworked and out of balance, according to business and motivational coach Leslie Groene, author of "Picture Yourself & the Life You Want" (Tiger Publishing, \$20).

But there are ways to dump the funk.

"The wintertime blues hit everyone," she says. "But if you take time out to be good to yourself -- read the good books you never seem to have time for, cuddle up by the fireplace, take bubble baths and generally relax -- you'll feed your soul and allow yourself to grow."

Winter can be especially tough for family businesses if siblings or cousins feel a sense of entitlement that precludes them from working as hard as others. Those companies should set up a family council that includes an outside adviser to help divvy up the labor, according to Judy Martel, author of "The Dilemmas of Family Wealth: Insights on Succession, Cohesion and Legacy" (Bloomberg Press, \$39.95).

Here are some tips on pulling out of the depths of the ice age season from Groene; Craig Cochran, a regional manager with Georgia Tech's Economic Development Institute; Jan Margolis, managing director of the Metuchen consulting firm Applied Research; and Drew Stevens, a Eureka, Mo., organizational consultant:

Invest in yourself: Learn something this winter to keep your mind fresh, and rejuvenate a stale career by showing higher-ups you are committed to lifelong learning and workplace advancement. Change your routine to keep things fresh and get back on track.

Momentum play: Are your New Year's resolutions fizzling? There is still time to meet this year's goals. Backsliding isn't failure. Celebrate what you have accomplished instead of focusing on what you haven't, maintain the momentum and look to the future.

Positive vibes: Surround yourself with people who support your goals and endeavors. Spending time with people who bring you down affects your focus and attitude -- both of which are essential to achieving success.

Customer focus: The key to keeping a business running in high gear is to focus all attention on the client. Organizations start to fall apart the moment they lose sight of the customer.

Set the tone: Leaders should remind employees of their mission within the organization. A quick daily meeting can establish the tone of the work week and be a source of inspiration in an size organization.

Train to win: Companies that enable more training can boost morale. Workers who are consistently well

trained and mentored are equipped with the proper tools to serve clients and will show outstanding passion for their jobs.

Sustain energy: What motivates employees during slow periods are management practices that make them feel as if they are being treated fairly. That means receiving a salary commensurate with their responsibilities, having adequate medical benefits, safe working conditions, a reasonable workload and an equal opportunity to advance.

Team management: In a high productivity organization, there is no doubt who is in charge. But managers who expect employees to think, exercise creative judgment and go beyond what is expected will receive the greatest productivity from their people.

Ethics test: Enthusiastic employees take pride in their work and their organization if the company's vision is based on more than profit. The best companies act ethically and produce high-quality products and services to add value to their customers.

Recharge batteries: Employees can sign up for courses at a community college or perhaps inspire human resources to hold "Lunch and Learn" sessions in which speakers talk to employees during their lunch hour. That will help cut down on lunchtime rumor-mongering.

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