



CAROLYN HAX

The life of one young mother feels like a treadmill

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

Dear Carolyn:
I am struggling with being grumpy, snappish and downright angry a lot lately, and there's really nothing more going on than the everyday overload of part-time work, parenting a preschooler, marriage, keeping a house running, keeping up with friends and family, etc.

I feel like I can't breathe sometimes because there is always so much to do and I rarely have time to myself. When I do have a few free moments, I'm usually too exhausted to do anything important to me, like write. I end up doing mindless things instead of what I really want, which depletes me further.

Any suggestions for breaking the cycle of feeling like life is just a treadmill of constant activity?

D.C.

The big one is to stop trying to do other things with your downtime, even things you consider important. Rest is important, too, and you're not getting any — except maybe in the form of those "mindless things," but you're not even letting yourself enjoy them. That makes them less restorative than they could be.

Some of the things keeping you busy are likely to be around for the long haul, like working, chores, social connections and fighting to preserve some time for your special interests. But some of the overload — namely, anything related to those relentless young-child needs — is temporary.

So embrace that. Talk to your husband, and pick a few things that you're willing to postpone until your preschooler is older and more self-reliant (I'm talking 6 or 7 years old, not far off). These can include your preferred amount of writing, cleanliness and contact with friends and family; all of them are at least candidates for the back burner.

Similarly, you can pick a few things that you consider your top priorities for right now. Those can include being available to live life at your preschooler's pace, or to make a set amount of time available for writing, or to put alone time on the weekly schedule, whatever. Seek out laughter. Include alone time for you and your husband, too; position your marriage as a tonic instead of a drain.

Once you have these two mental lists prepared, put them into effect. Start postponing the less urgent things and making time for your priorities.

And, maybe most important, change your outlook on downtime. Decide right now to stop beating yourself up when you spend your precious free time on accomplishing "nothing." Realize you are indeed accomplishing something: You're shutting down. We all have to do it. We can't be productive with every waking minute of every day.

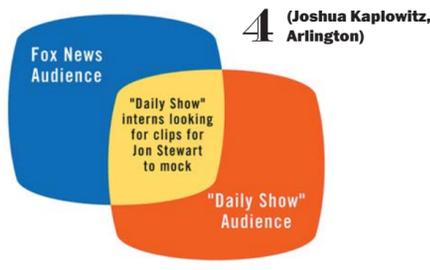
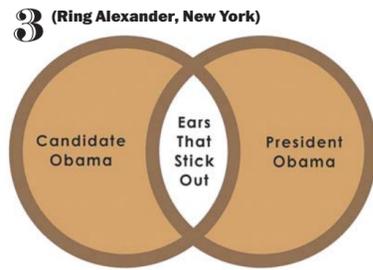
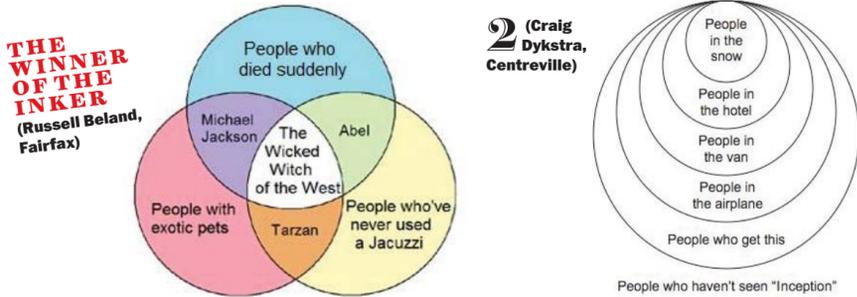
Accept this, and the mindless things won't feel like a soul-depleting failure. Make it your mantra: slow down, ask less of yourself, ask less of others, ask less of this time in your life.

As always, if it doesn't work — if the angry mood persists — then it's time to consider talking to a therapist. That might not be the kind of time to yourself that you had in mind, I suppose, but it might be necessary to find out why you're putting so much pressure on yourself to be everything at once.

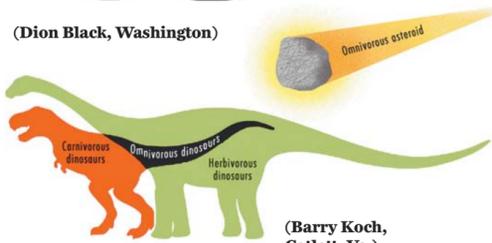
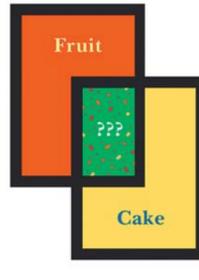
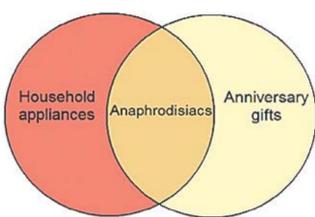
THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 879

in which we asked you to express some observation about similarities and dissimilarities as a Venn diagram (or, in some cases, a Euler diagram, which doesn't have to show every possible intersection)



BELOW-GRADE INTERSECTIONS



See 15 more diagrams in the gallery of this column's online version at washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational.

Next week: Our greatest hit, or Lex-change operations

Online discussion Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at washingtonpost.com/styleconversational.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 883: Same difference

- ✓ Chicken lo mein
- ✓ The New York Yankees
- ✓ Water balloons
- ✓ A dental appointment
- ✓ Illinois
- ✓ Montezuma's Revenge
- ✓ Arlington National Cemetery
- ✓ An Elizabethan sonnet
- ✓ Gulf Coast beaches
- ✓ Venn diagrams
- ✓ A Real Housewife of D.C.
- ✓ School lunches
- ✓ The Nobel Prize
- ✓ Your friend's nose

Here's a perennial Invitational contest that treads some of the same ground as this week's results, without all the circles and stuff: Choose any two items from the list above and explain why they are alike or are different from each other.

Some of the categories were used in non-inking entries for the Venn diagram contest; maybe they'll feel more at home here.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives the fine reference book "Five People Who Died During Sex, and 100 Other Terribly Tasteless Lists."

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yeamed-for Loser Mug, Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Loser Magnets, First Offenders get a smelly, tree-shaped air "freshener" (Fir Stink for their First Ink), One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Aug. 30. Put "Week 883" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results to be published Sept. 18. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's results is by Chris Doyle; this week's honorable-mentions subhead is by Kevin Dopart. The diagrams were produced by Bob Staake and Valerie Holt; Craig Dykstra did his own.

For Allen, recalling 'Pop-pop' and his roots

ALLEN FROM C1

ton Hyatt-Regency hotel, where a schedule of morning workshops included "What You Always Wanted to Know About Judaism But Were Afraid to Ask," and "Men's Beginners' Services" ("Do you ever feel lost in the synagogue? Does the Hebrew liturgy swim before your eyes?").

The retreat-goers prepared for Allen's evening keynote address with a Scotch tasting ("Our sincerest thanks to Shopper's Vineyard Wine and Spirits") and then tucked into a glatt kosher meal of squash soup, grilled chicken and vegetables. Allen and his wife, Susan, joined the audience for dinner, with the politician mingling with Virginia delegations and eagerly shaking hands.

"His mother's Jewish; we definitely view him wholeheartedly as a fellow Jew," said Rabbi Efraim Mintz, executive director of the movement's Jewish Learning Institute. Mintz said it was not for him to judge how Allen "chooses to celebrate his Jewishness."

The rabbi drew a connection between Allen's visit and the work of the Mitzvah Tanks.

"The idea of the Mitzvah Tank is to inspire and awaken Jewish awareness," he said. "The fact that George feels fully comfortable with his Jewish identity and his Jewish origin sends a strong message to the community."

Shortly after 7 p.m., attendees said, Allen, wearing a navy suit and blue-and-yellow tie, rose to the stage and addressed the 600 children of Israel. He talked about what it was like to be the child of a football god.

"You can learn a lot from football — level playing field, equal opportunity regardless of background, meritocracy, et cetera," Allen said, according to prepared remarks. Allen, whose late father coached the Washington Redskins, often invokes the mystery of the gridiron. But that's not exactly what this crowd came to hear. After some throat-clearing, Allen got to the point.

"Let me paint for you a picture of the family revelation and how it transpired," he said.

He talked about his mother, Henriette "Ettie" Allen, who, unbeknownst to him, was brought up as a Jew in North Africa. Over breakfast one day, he quizzed her about her ancestry, which had become a needling topic of inquiry in the senator's 2006 reelection campaign.

"I then followed up and asked if any of her family way back were of the Jewish religious faith? I asked my mother about the possible Portuguese and Jewish roots, I simply said, 'Is there anything to this, many centuries ago?'" Allen recalled. After more prodding, he said, she revealed her own Jewishness, which she had hid for decades.

(Back in 2006, Ettie Allen told a Wash-



BENTZI SASSON/JEWISH LEARNING INSTITUTE

SHOFAR, SO GOOD: After speaking to the crowd, Allen blows a shofar.

ington Post reporter that she explained to her son that she had concealed her roots for fear of anti-Semitism, but also because her future husband didn't want her to tell his mother. Plus, she said, he wanted to be a football coach. "How

many Jewish coaches are there?") Allen said he had promised "on Pop-pop's head" that he would tell no one, referring to his mother's father. "My mother then haltingly told me that 'Pop-pop was Jewish.' I was surprised."

Allen said it was this promise that accounted for some awkward moments during the 2006 campaign, when he answered a question about his possible Jewish heritage at a campaign debate by saying, "My mother's French Italian, with a little Spanish blood in her. And I was raised as she was, as far as I know, raised as a Christian."

In front of the crowd in Reston, Allen described the discovery of his Jewish roots as "interestingly positive." Then, according to the prepared text, he added: "I found those facts interesting because I majored in history and have been a leader for nanotechnology."

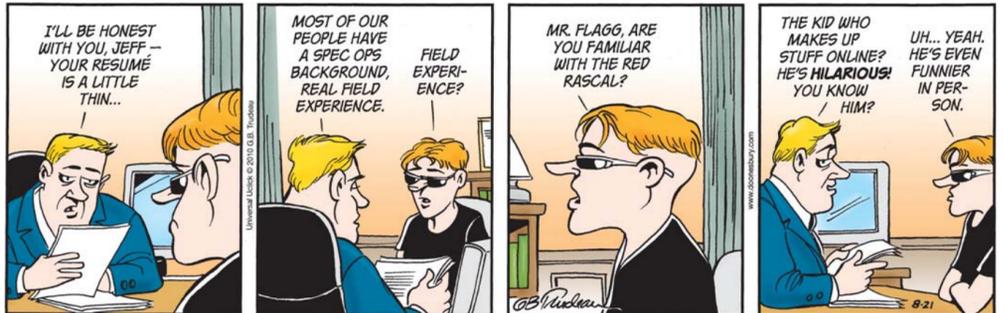
Allen concluded his speech to a standing ovation. Mintz climbed the stage and presented Allen with a carved shofar, explaining its symbolism and its use on the High Holy Days. Allen was visibly moved, attendees said, then returned to the microphone and talked about how connected he felt to his Pop-pop. Then he blew the shofar.

Baila Olidort, editor in chief of the Lubavitch News Service, was impressed.

"For someone who has never blown shofar before," she said, "he did well."

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DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU

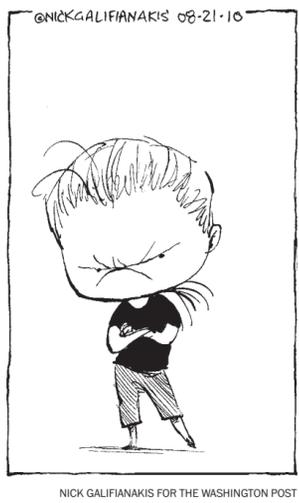


CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON



Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on www.washingtonpost.com/discussions.

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NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST