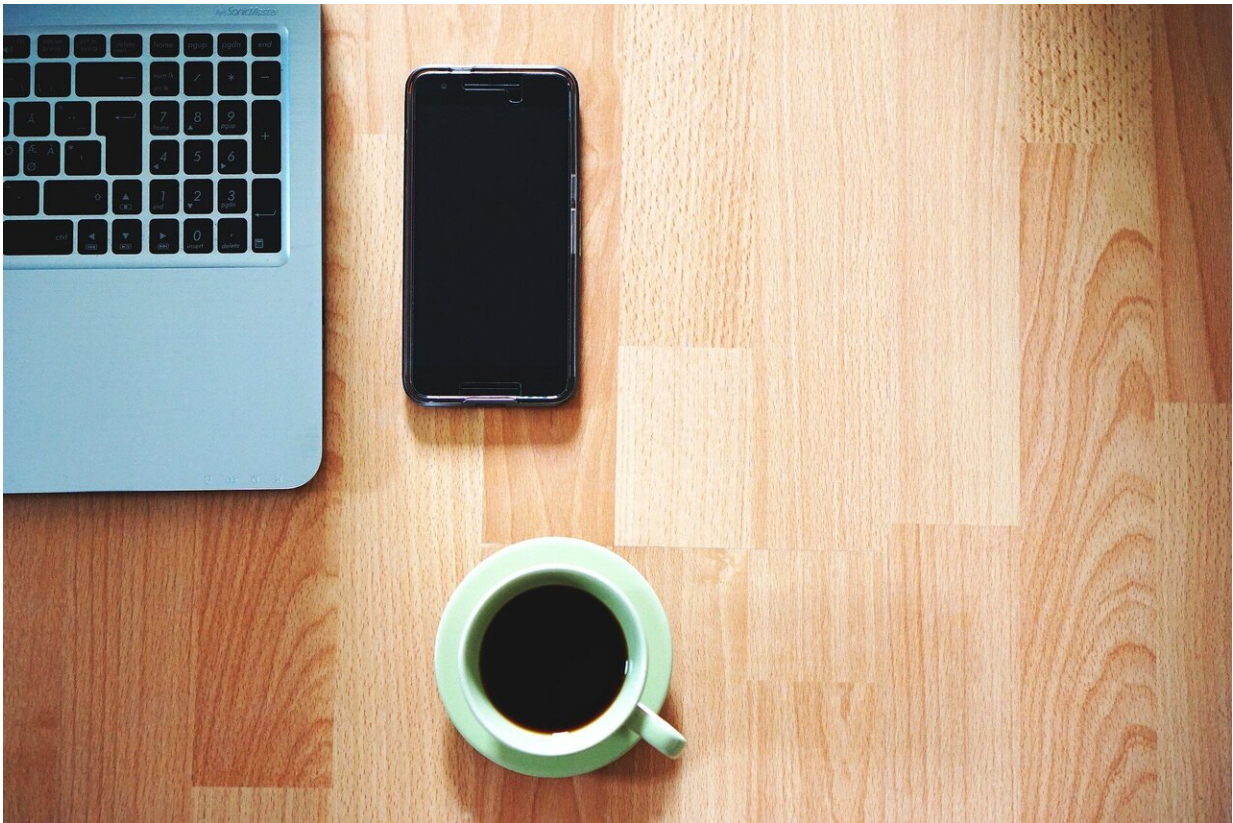


Morning routine disruptions hurt worker productivity, researcher finds

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Disruption of workers' morning routines causes them to be less focused and less productive, according to research by a University of Wyoming faculty member and his colleagues at Texas A&M University.

Shawn McClean, an assistant professor in the Department of Management and Marketing in the UW College of Business, led a series of studies that found that something as simple as missing one's regular [morning](#) cup of coffee can cause that employee to begin the workday less calm and more mentally exhausted.

"Whatever the routine, disruptions to it leave employees feeling less engaged and being less productive over the course of the day," McClean and his colleagues wrote in an article in the *London School of Economics Business Review*.

The research, first published in the journal *Personnel Psychology*, also is noted in the November-December issue of *Harvard Business Review*, a preeminent [business](#) magazine. Joining McClean in the research were Joel Koopman, Junhyok Yim and Anthony Klotz, of Texas A&M's Mays Business School.

The researchers conducted two studies among employees of a large U.S. university. This included surveying participants three times per day over a three-week period regarding the extent to which they had followed usual morning practices, such as eating, exercising and commuting to work; and regarding their mental energy, calmness and engagement throughout the workday.

Even taking into account other factors, such as quality of sleep, tension and day of the week, the researchers found that people were less calm and more depleted mentally on days when their morning routines were disrupted than on other days. And, they were less engaged with their work and made less progress toward their goals.

The reason?

"Because routines automate basic elements of daily life, they help

conserve energy to dedicate toward achieving goals during the day," the researchers wrote. "But when a routine is disrupted, what was previously automated requires conscious thought."

McClellan and his colleagues say establishing a morning routine and sticking with it is important for workers to be maximally productive, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Find something predictable around which to anchor the morning, such as waking up at the same time, taking the dog for a walk before having the first cup of coffee, or spending 20 minutes on meditation or yoga. This can provide a predictable foundation around which to structure the rest of the morning," they wrote. "However, it may not always be possible to avoid disruption to routines—indeed, COVID-19 seems to create novel disruptions daily. When that happens, it is critical to get back on track."

Managers, meanwhile, should take steps to avoid being a source of disruption to employees' routines, the researchers suggest.

"For example, while it may be tempting to call employees first thing in the morning, doing so may disrupt a critical component of their morning [routine](#)," they wrote. "Answering that call could throw off the typical flow of the morning, causing the [employee](#) to forget to pack a lunch for their child, and forcing them to temporarily leave work later in the day to bring their child lunch. In this way, one [disruption](#) can snowball into lower productivity across an entire workday."

More information: Shawn T. McClellan et al. Stumbling out of the gate: The energy-based implications of morning routine disruption, *Personnel Psychology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/peps.12419](https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12419)

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