

36. Solve Puzzles

*A human being can survive
almost anything as long as she
sees the end in sight. But
depression is so insidious, and
it compounds daily, that it's
impossible to ever see the end.*

— Elizabeth Wurtzel
American Writer, Journalist, and
Lawyer

For me, puzzles do three things:

- You can only think of one thing at a time. When I do a puzzle, before I go to sleep, that's all I can think about. All my troubles, cares, minor annoyances go away.
- Puzzles can keep you sharp. I know that the puzzles, that I like, keep me on my toes. Recently I started realizing that my vocabulary (my verbal skills) were declining. I started doing some easy crossword puzzles and I am pretty sure my verbal skills are improving.
- Puzzles can set my mood. I'll turn on my computer in the morning (I seem to do everything on my computer) and the first thing I'll do is play my favorite solitaire game. If I win then I feel great and I know I'll have a good day (there is absolutely no scientific evidence for this). Of course, the game is set to only a medium level so my chances of winning are vastly improved.

Another benefit of puzzles is that they can be a gauge of how you feel and what mental shape you are in. When I do a puzzle, I need a clear head to think. If I get stuck and can't finish the puzzle then I know that my cognitive abilities are not at their peak and it's time to go to sleep.

When I pick up that puzzle again (the one that had me stuck), and suddenly I'm no longer at an impasse, then I know my thinking is clearer and it may be because I'm feeling better. I take that as a sign that I should be doing something from one of my to-do lists (see Strategy 21 – Lists, Calendars and Routines).

There are all kinds of puzzles to choose from. Select one type that you enjoy and is not too difficult. After all, you want to be able to win.