

What Motivates Me When Things Get Hard

Let's just admit it: February is a tough month. We're still in the dead of winter, and the days are dreary and slushy. For years, I've always planned vacations around this time, so I have something to look forward to other than seeing the sunlight out of the window at my office. Sometimes I wonder why I live up north; I'm always in a better mood in the summer!

But in those moments when my motivation is tanking or the cold, gray days are getting me down, I just look up and scan the walls of my office. Along each wall, I have dozens and dozens of photos of my wife and my kids. I walk around, and I see the time we were in Aruba together, or I find a photo of a memorable tournament Mikey and his team won. I have collages of Gabby at dance and her beaming face in all her various costumes. I have photos from our cruises and date nights my wife and I were able to sneak away to. There isn't an inch of space left on my office wall!

For those brief moments when I look around, I'm reminded why I do what I do every day. I'm always inspired to help my clients, but my family is my ultimate motivation. I do this work so Mikey and Gabby can do what they love, so we can take vacations together, and so we can live better lives.

Of course, those moments enshrined in a gallery on my walls aren't without their difficulties, too. It certainly isn't easy to wake up early on a Saturday morning to drive Mikey to his 7 a.m. practice! Because of the pandemic, parents can't even go into the facility to watch their children practice. So, they sit in their cars, fending off sleep for the next two hours, while they wait. (For us, the distance to drive home and back is too far for the practice time.)



However, while those photos on my office walls remind me how valuable the work I do in the office is, they are also subtle reminders that this chapter with my kids is on a clock; the early-morning wake-up calls and lost weekends spent traveling to tournaments are worth it. These days have



a shelf life. Mikey is a sophomore in high school this year, and Gabby is already looking at colleges as a junior in high school. Her competitive dance career is slated to end when she graduates high school. Mikey intends to play in college, but his days as a youth player are numbered.

These are going to be some of my greatest memories someday — they already are — so Jill and I make sure each day has value. Whether it's sitting down at a restaurant together (when we could) or making sure we have meals each week at home together, Jill and I make sure our family finds time for each other in the chaos. Jill comes with me to those Saturday morning (or evening) practices, and we spend that time talking about our week and catching up. We even try to have date nights when the kids are both away at practices on certain nights of the week!

February is when things start to get a little more difficult. Some of us give up on our goals, and the cold winter days certainly don't make doing anything easier. I feel really blessed to have a family that motivates me and reminds me of my purpose on those hard days — even if that reminder comes at 5 a.m. on a Saturday.

—Mike Monteforte



The Original Death by Chocolate

17TH CENTURY CHOCOHOLICS GET REVENGE

National Dark Chocolate Day and National Chocolate Fondue Day both fall this month (on Feb. 1 and Feb. 5, respectively), and in honor of those tasty holidays, we investigated the original “death by chocolate” — an act of legendary revenge.

Rumor has it that the controversy started in the 1600s in Chiapas, Mexico, when a group of chocoholic churchgoers started bringing their favorite sweet snack to services. This annoyed the bishop, who resorted to banning parishioners from eating chocolate during church. As an article in Indian Country Today tells it, the chocoholics got back at the bishop by poisoning his daily cup of chocolatl, an Aztec chocolate drink. Who knew the ancestor of hot cocoa could be so deadly?

Surprisingly, this crazy story isn't the origin of the “death by chocolate” cake we love today. That dessert was created in 1993 by Chef Marcel Desaulniers, then-owner of The Trellis restaurant in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Here's the restaurant's mouthwatering description of the seven-layer confection, which takes three days to make:

“The decadence begins with layers of moist chocolate cake, dark chocolate ganache, crunchy chocolate meringue, and an airy chocolate mousse. The cake is then coated in a glaze of dark chocolate and served on a pool of chocolate sauce with house-made milk chocolate ice cream, topped with a hand-rolled white chocolate truffle, and finally dusted with white chocolate powder.”

Is your mouth watering yet? The original version of death by chocolate might be a bit complex for the average chef, but if you're craving a slice, you can find more accessible recipes at Delish.com and SugarGeekShow.com. Just remember that when you pull it out of the oven, we don't live in the 1600s, so you should probably restrain yourself from poisoning anyone who steals a bite!

How much do you love chocolate? Would you be willing to die for a taste of your favorite candy bar? Would you kill for one? You've probably never thought to ask yourself these questions, but if tall tales can be believed, arguments over chocolate have, in fact, turned deadly.

FROM BOOKS TO ... PRESCRIPTION DRUGS?

Amazon Launches Amazon Pharmacy

For years, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos has been vocal about his plan to disrupt the American health care system. In 2018, Bezos and his millionaire pals Warren Buffett (CEO of Berkshire Hathaway) and Jamie Dimon (CEO of JPMorgan Chase) formed a company called Haven Healthcare to “stem the rise of employer health care spending,” according to Bloomberg Businessweek.

That venture fell apart, but Bezos never took his eyes off the prize. That same year, Amazon bought a drug-delivery startup. In 2019, it started selling its own brand of over-the-counter medication. Then, in November of 2019, Amazon opened Amazon Pharmacy to sell prescription drugs online. The new program offers Prime members two-day delivery and massive discounts on generic and name-brand drugs. Given Amazon's history, this was no surprise.

Since starting in 1994 as a marketplace exclusively for books, Amazon has worked toward becoming a one-stop shop for everything, especially all things health and fitness. Health-conscious people have bought workout equipment, supplements, snacks, fitness books, and more on the website for years. Then, in 2017, Amazon bought the organic grocery store Whole Foods and offered shopping discounts to Prime members, further cornering the market of health-conscious consumers.

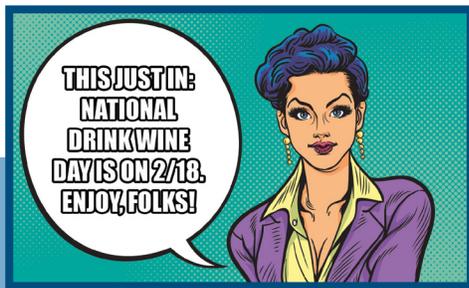
Both the Whole Foods purchase and the failed Haven Healthcare venture foreshadowed the arrival of Amazon Pharmacy. The latter showed how serious Bezos is about diving into the highly regulated realm of health care and insurance. The former revealed the growing importance of Prime membership in an increasingly Amazon-owned world.

According to Business Insider, Prime members have access to “discounts of up to 80% on generic drugs and 40% on brand-name medications when paying without insurance” through Amazon Pharmacy. Doctors can also send prescriptions directly to Amazon. If you have insurance, you can simply type your insurance and payment information directly into the website and have medication delivered to your door. To check out Amazon Pharmacy, head to Amazon.com and click on the menu in the top left corner of the home page. Then scroll down to “Programs and Features.”

All of that said, Amazon isn't the only — or even best — option for purchasing prescription drugs online. The U.S. Food & Drug Administration's BeSafeRx program offers tips and a comprehensive list of online pharmacies nationwide. Visit FDA.gov today to learn more.



TAKE A BREAK



‘MY FURRY VALENTINE’ PUP SNACKS

Inspired by SugarTheGoldenRetriever.com

Who needs a Valentine’s Day date when you have a furry friend at home? This Feb. 14, show your pooch your love with these frosty strawberry dog treats. Use a heart-shaped silicone mold to make this snack extra festive.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup plain yogurt
- 1/4 cup frozen strawberries, puréed

Directions

1. Fill each heart in the mold 3/4 full with yogurt.
2. Freeze the yogurt hearts for 1 hour.
3. When the yogurt is set, add the puréed strawberry on top of each heart to fill the rest of the mold.
4. Freeze for another hour, then share the tasty treats with your dog!

Note: If you don’t have a heart-shaped mold, you can freehand your treats on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Freeze 1 tbsp dollops of yogurt for an hour, then top with 1/2 tsp of strawberry purée and freeze another hour.

Lonely on Valentine’s Day?

Try These 3 Tricks to Improve Your Mindset



If you feel like the “before” actor in a Match.com commercial right now, you’re not the only one. Valentine’s Day causes an epidemic of loneliness. But contrary to those cheesy commercials, the feeling isn’t exclusive to people struggling to find a date — and it won’t necessarily be solved by one.

What is loneliness, really?

Psychology Today defines loneliness as “the state of distress or discomfort that results when one perceives a gap between one’s desires for social connection and actual experiences of it.” That means you can get lonely any time you crave a deeper connection to someone, even if you’re married and have 500 Facebook friends. If COVID-19 lockdowns and canceled holiday celebrations have left you frustrated and sad, you’ve caught the loneliness bug.

How can you fight the feeling?

- **Work out your social muscles.** If you don’t push yourself to connect with others regularly, it’s easy to fall into the trap of loneliness and depression. You have to commit to your social life just like you would to an exercise routine. To do this, try blocking off time in your calendar to call your friends or loved ones, or join an online group with regular Zoom meetings you’re committed to showing up for.
- **Add more art into your social life.** Researcher Jeremy Nobel, the head of The UnLonely Project, says that getting creative with other people could help reverse loneliness. If you’re feeling disconnected, try collaborating with your sibling, roommate, friend, spouse, or child on something artistic. You can paint together, have a jam session, take photos, or write a poem. Whatever you choose, getting creative will bring you closer.
- **Find and fix your negative behaviors.** Does scrolling through social media make you feel like you’re missing out on all the fun or leave you feeling like a zombie? If so, it’s probably time for a hiatus. As you go about your day or week, keep a notebook with you and write down what you’re doing when you feel loneliness creep in. By identifying those negative behaviors and swapping them with positive ones, you can turn your thoughts around.

Loneliness is serious: It’s a predictor of premature death, and one leading researcher compared its health impacts to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. If you’re coping with loneliness, try the tips above, and if you continue to struggle, reach out to a counselor near you.



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The Battle of the Brads

HOW THE REAL BRAD PITT WON IN COURT AGAINST A WOMAN SCAMMED BY A FAKE BRAD

When actor/producer Brad Pitt makes headlines, it's usually to take credit for an award, talk about his new hairstyle, or fend off the latest gossip about his relationship with Jennifer Aniston. But last fall, the '90s heartthrob made the front page of Page Six for an entirely different reason: He won one of the craziest lawsuits of the year.

The saga started out strange and continued to escalate. It began in 2018 when businesswoman Kelli Christina fell for a Brad Pitt charity scheme. A man claiming to be Pitt approached Christina online and asked for her to organize fundraisers for his charity, the Make It Right Foundation. The charity is very real. Pitt founded it in 2007 to help rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and as of 2019, it had funded more than 100 eco-friendly homes. However, the Make It Right Foundation has also been hit by scandal after scandal, including allegations of poorly built houses "rotting and collapsing." And, of course, the Pitt who'd contacted Christina wasn't the real deal.

None of this mattered to Christina, though. She was just excited that "Brad Pitt" had taken

an interest in her! According to Page Six, in addition to soliciting donations, the Pitt wannabe also wooed Christina romantically with what she later called, "discussions of marriage." Just when things were getting steamy, the fake Brad took off with the businesswoman's cash.

Page Six reports that "in court papers, [Christina] said that the fake Pitt asked her for \$40,000 to attend the events, but 'canceled' at the last minute each time — then disappeared with the money."

The scam isn't even the craziest part. When the truth came out, Christina sued the real Pitt for failing to protect her from his double! After a long time on the court's docket, a judge finally dismissed the \$100,000 lawsuit last November and Pitt reclaimed his dignity. Luckily, some good came out of the whole debacle. According to Page Six, Christina is now working on "a joint project between the government and the Hollywood establishment" to protect future victims from scammers like the Pitt impersonator who broke Christina's heart.

