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The Only Time You Truly Can Have Everything is on a Bagel

By Michael Preston
UCF Forum columnist
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Of all of the bagels there is nothing quite as satisfying to me than the Everything Bagel with cream cheese at a shop in town. It gives me everything I want out of life: a warm bagel that is crunchy on the outside, soft on the inside; a savory and salty blend of sea salt, garlic, poppy seed, onion, and other stuff I cannot place right now. And then the cream cheese. Goopy and sweet, it cuts through all of the savory in a way that is magical.

Sometimes I wish my life was like that Everything Bagel, that I could just have it all in one, delightful place. Unfortunately, life is not an Everything Bagel.

Let me explain. There are only 24 hours in a day and 168 hours in a week. Now, if I wanted to do everything that I feel society (or the numerous articles posted to my Facebook and Twitter feeds) wants me to do, then my day would look pretty much like this:

Get eight hours of restful sleep.

Meditate for 30 minutes.

Exercise for 1 hour. (30 minutes cardio, 15 minutes stretching and 15 minutes of strength training.)

Have a full breakfast. (That's got to take 30 minutes, right?)

Get ready for work, 1 hour.

Drive to work, that's another 30 minutes.

Work without distractions for nine hours (with an hour for lunch).

Drive home, another 30 minutes.

Take our daughter to dance class. (That takes 15 minutes both ways, so 30 more minutes).

Uninterrupted dinner with the whole family, 1½ hours.

Television? Isn't that why you have a Roku and HBO Go? 2 hours.

I will stop there because I am already at 25 hours and we have not even gotten to putting the kids to bed, reading, cleaning the house, answering emails that cannot wait until tomorrow, helping with homework, spending time with friends...the list goes on and on.

Here's the point. It is time we just admit that everything is only good for a bagel.

According to a 2015 study by the World Mental Health Society, Americans were the most anxious society in the industrialized world. About 18 percent, or nearly one in five, Americans have suffered from or will suffer from anxiety at an annual total cost of \$42 billion dollars a year. People with anxiety disorder are five times more likely to visit a doctor and there has long been evidence to support that being anxious leads to other physical illnesses. We are literally worrying ourselves sick.

Author Kevin Chapman, an assistant professor of clinical psychology and director of the CAFÉ Brain Research Lab at the University of Louisville has two ideas as to why we are so anxious in our desire to have it all.

The first is something called "normalcy bias." Normalcy bias is generally considered a reaction to a traumatic event like a hurricane or tornado. When faced with impending doom, victims can pretend like it is not happening and ignore the dangers. It is the worst kind of wishful thinking and can be dangerous. People who think they need to have it all can also suffer from a form of normalcy bias. Their desire to have it all can force them into tremendous debt, cause them to sleep too little, or try to take on too much. All in an effort to "keep up with the Joneses."

Essentially, even when faced with the reality of our shortcomings and the need to change or modify our lives, we pretend everything is okay so we can maintain an appearance of perfection and having it all.

Author Lexi Herrick outlined in her 2015 article for the Huffington Post how this normalcy bias can manifest itself on social media and make it worse. According to your news feed it is pretty obvious your friends are perfect and have everything. They always look great, have wonderful, loving relationships, party nonstop, travel to exotic locales, eat the best food while on the perfect diet, are fitness gym rats with hyper-cute and competent kids and puppies, and have the nicest clothes.

It's true, your Facebook friends are just cooler and more perfect than you are. This normalcy bias based on false pretenses creates a mirage of sorts. We know this is not true. Heck, we were just eating lunch with those people and their lives are a mess. But we allow ourselves to buy into it because we project the same sense of perfection, too.

The other major factor, according to Chapman, is achievement motivation. We all desire to be at our best and to lead great lives of purpose and direction. I do not know a single 5-year-old who desires to be confined to a cubicle pumping out reports or working as a sales representative for a company. Kids want to be firefighters, dancers, or the president.

Achievement motivation posits that when we strive for and get something we covet as high achievement then we will be happier and more fulfilled. The problem is these high expectations are reserved for a very few and sometimes the road to high achievement is blocked by other factors such as personal ability, family obligations and the talents of others. We tend to convince ourselves that we are more worthy than others are for jobs, promotions and opportunities, and our ability to self-evaluate is poor.

As a kid I was sure I was going to be a great shooting guard for the North Carolina Tarheels basketball team. I did not factor in that I was too short, slow, could not shoot, and also had never played organized basketball in my life. I was just really, really good in my driveway. Needless to say, I did not even make the first cut.

Achievement motivation can add to our anxiety when we fail to meet our personal expectations. This shortfall can make us realize we might not have it all as we envisioned at 5 years old. This can be demotivating and add to our anxiety.

But there is hope.

I find hope in the Everything Bagel. I love its simplicity, its balance. I love that it is less expensive than other breakfast choices and that it satisfies without making me too full.

We can look to our lives for the same kind of everything balance. Chapman acknowledges that when people understand their personal expectations and limitations and strive for more balance and simplicity, then the pressure to have it all or to be perfect subsides. By just adding the right mix of self-appraisal and expectations we can take a more pragmatic approach to life.

The Everything Bagel does not have *everything* I love. There is no peanut butter, no craft beer, no bacon, and no hot sauce. Those things are great, too, but there is no room for them on this bagel.

If they were placed there the bagel would become unbalanced, imperfect. Besides, there will likely be time for those other things later. I will fit them in when appropriate and when it makes sense.

For now, I will enjoy this Everything Bagel for all of its simplicity and charm. I may get a bit of cream cheese on my shirt and some of the toppings may fall off, showing me that life is imperfect, but who cares, this is the Everything Bagel and it's pretty darn good.

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