Groundhog Day Again
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As the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic grinds on and many of us continue to work from home, it can feel as if we are in the movie Groundhog Day. In the movie, Phil Connors, played by Bill Murray, wakes up to the same day, every day, day after day. Before Phil got stuck in this time loop, he had been self-centered, arrogant, and a miserable cynic. As his repeated day repeats, he gradually develops insight and realizes that he can become a better person, especially after he fails repeatedly to win over a love interest using deception and manipulation. This puts him on a quest to better himself, to become kinder and more compassionate, to find opportunities to give to others without expecting anything in return, and to even learn to play the piano. When he reaches selfless enlightenment, he not only gets the relationship that he wants, but also has earned the love of the community to which he has given. Then, and only then, does he get released from the time loop and can continue with his life. The movie brings up profound issues about character, desire, motivation, and the challenges of the best ways to use one’s limited time on earth.

The COVID-19 days can blend into each other and blur the boundaries between work and home. Those of us who are lucky enough to hold onto our jobs and have been able to work remotely can also suffer from “Zoom fatigue” after hours of staring at our colleagues on a two-dimensional screen. It seems to be working well enough but the casual conversations and spontaneous social interactions at work are missing. Our social lives and those of our patients have also gone missing as we need to curtail our physical contact with people—yet another loss. The gain, however, may be the gift of time, especially for those who spent a lot of time commuting and going back and forth to meetings. In this gift of time is an opportunity to use the lessons from Groundhog Day and reflect on motivation. Motivation is fueled by keeping in mind some future goal and predicting a desirable outcome worth expending effort for. We continuously ask ourselves and compute, “Is the anticipated reward worth the cost?” Do we pursue a high cost/high reward or a low cost/low reward strategy? Do we take up a new musical instrument, a hobby, read those books one always intended to but never had the time for, or watch movies on the couch day after day? The choices we make about how to best spend our time now will have a profound effect on our future selves. See what you can do to take advantage of these most challenging of times.

REFERENCES