

Time to alter our nagging to-do lists

by MARK PAVILONS

?We need to do a better job of putting ourselves higher on our own ?to-do' list.? ? Michelle Obama

Just how did our wonderful lives become one massive to-do list?

Most of us working stiffs ? the 9-to-5ers ? have fallen into crippling routines. We set our alarms, get up, head into work and put in a day's worth of wage-earning duties.

The day may be fully planned or booked, with back-to-back meetings or appointments. In the ?lulls? we grab a quick bite, maybe run across the street for a coffee, then back at it.

During our drive home, we try to decompress, gather our thoughts and relax.

Awaiting us are a few more chores, preparing dinner, tidying up the kitchen. If we're lucky, we find a nice surprise in the mailbox or on the doorstep courtesy of Amazon.

We settle in, clean up after dinner and watch the high-definition screen, catching up on reality TV and getting our fill on commercials with messages about how ugly we are and why we need limited-time-only burgers.

We let our guard down, just long enough to be lulled into a false sense of security. Then the late-night news comes in, smacking us the face with the harsh realities of the day ? the tragedies, conflict and multitude of reasons our lives will be challenging for the next few days or weeks.

And the circle starts anew the next morning.

On weekends, we catch a few extra Zs, and try to scratch off a few items on our list. We stare at the ominous to-do list wondering just where to start.

To borrow from Jim Carry in *The Grinch*, part of my to-do list involves making time for self-loathing and staring into the abyss. Then there's talking to myself, but I can always cancel that and reschedule.

And this, in a nutshell, is many of our lives.

Was this how the Almighty intended us to live?

Unfortunately, most westerners just don't get it, and this will be our undoing. It's been reported that the majority of Canadians don't even take the vacation time given to them. I know I don't.

Our European cousins, for instance, make sure they take their full holidays. In many countries their days progress at a much slower pace, and the afternoons bring a siesta or extended lunch breaks. They commonly stretch for three hours in Spain and Greece. They enjoy their food, the camaraderie and count their blessings

I'm not sure what types of things are on their to-do lists, but you can bet they're nowhere near as long as ours.

We Canucks look forward to our week or two at the cottage or in the backyard pool.

I love summer, and even grabbing 20 minutes at the start or end of each day.

To me, it's like Mother Nature is giving us a great big hug, embracing us with her riches.

Summer is teeming with life, sights and sounds that undoubtedly trigger joy hormones to be released.

Our biggest organ ? our skin ? can't wait to shed the encumbrances of long pants and shirts, in favour of the much more fashionable shorts, Hawaiian shirts (my absolute favourite) and sandals.

In the summer when we used to venture north, I remember not having socks on for the entire trip.

So, for just a few brief moments each year we shed our burdens and let them melt away, just like the ice in our tropical drinks. Our breathing deepens and our chests swell. We smile, for no reason at all.

And we toss our to-do lists in the trash, deciding they're simply irrelevant.

It's quite the bummer returning to a ?normal??routine after a vacation.

We tense up, and stress begins to flow again, creeping over us like a rash from poison ivy.

We look around and while we may enjoy our lavish homes, we miss the simplicity of the wide open spaces, of being within arm's reach of nature.

Often, the first thing I do is grab a cold one and head outside to the back yard, refusing to give in to reality and what lies waiting past the end of the driveway. To heck with it, I say.

I don't really need expensive lake toys, a dock or drinks with umbrellas in them. At my age, I'm forced to look for carb-reduced beer and make sure I?use sunscreen.

Simple pleasures are just fine by me.

Give me one endless summer so I can truly live. Give me an endless supply of propane, food for the grill and more colourful shirts than I can count. Give me a lawn that remains lush and green for the entire season. Give me serenity.

It's tough to simply take a step back and just ?be.? We are conditioned to be busy, to make sure things get done and to badger our kids. We have to cook constantly, or be faced with the dreaded comment:??there's nothing to eat!?

We feel it necessary to give advice and perhaps intervene now and again.

We wish the best for our kids, but have trouble keeping our thoughts to ourselves.

We take on everyone else's to-do list, too!

Maybe we should revamp our to-do lists to include: Be thankful, count blessings, smile at strangers, hug family members and hum a favourite song.