

Editor's notes:

According to the Naturalist's Almanac, the saying "in like a lion, out like a lamb" first appeared in an English play in 1624. According to one observer, over the past few years, March has come in like a lion 71 percent of the time and has gone out like a lamb 83 percent. It looks like March this year will be roaring. And even though the weather may not be amusing you very much right now, maybe these dates will put a smile on your face.

Procrastination Week, March 1-7 -- To promote the many benefits of putting off until tomorrow everything that needn't be done today.

Iditarod Dog-Sled Race, March 6 -- The fabled 1,049 mile race runs from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska, with each sled drawn by 16 huskies.

Pi Day, March 14 -- Math geeks everywhere enjoy the date 3-14, which is the beginning of the infinite series of numbers that one gets when dividing the circumference of a circle by its diameter: 3.1415926535 . . .

Ides of March, March 15 -- "Beware the Ides of March," as it is considered a day in which bad luck is often brought on people. It's the anniversary of the death of Julius Caesar, emperor of Rome, in 44 B.C., who was betrayed and assassinated by a group of peers.

St. Patrick's Day, March 17 -- This day celebrates the saint who brought Christianity to Ireland. He was born in Britain around 385 C.E. to British-Roman parents. He was captured by pirates when 16 and sold into slavery in Ireland. After working as a shepherd for six years, he escaped and travelled to France, where he became a priest. In 432 he was made a bishop. Patrick returned to Ireland to spread the Christian faith. St. Patrick is credited with personally converting thousands of pagans. He died on March 17, 461. So many wonderful deeds are attributed to Saint Patrick that every spring throngs of revellers don green apparel and toast him with a pint or two.

By the way, the shamrock has become the symbol of Ireland and St. Patrick because of his use of it to illustrate the concept of the Holy Trinity. He would explain that the stem was symbolic of the nature of God, with the leaves illustrating the Three-in-One (Father, Son and Holy Ghost).

First Day of Spring, March 20 -- On the vernal equinox, the sun rises due east and sets due west everywhere on Earth (except near the poles). The amount of daylight -- 12 hours, eight minutes -- is virtually the same everywhere, too.

Are you really listening?

For better relations with your employees, customers, and managers, avoid these listening mistakes:

- **Discounting the issue.** Don't minimize the importance of what another person has said. Saying, "Oh, it's not that big of a deal," can make another feel that you think their concerns are trivial. The intent of a response should be to support and encourage.
- **Offering unwanted advice.** When you jump in to tell the other person what to do, you may be solving the wrong problem without understanding all the issues. You may also send the message that you don't think the speaker is capable of solving his or her own problems. Give advice only when asked.
- **Interrogating the person.** We often respond to a problem by analyzing it: asking a lot of probing questions and judging the other person's response. Be careful—don't alienate the person with too many questions and interruptions. Let him or her finish before searching for solutions.

Generate More Ideas with This Technique

Creativity is hard work, but you can strengthen your creative muscles with a simple exercise. Here's how it works:

Step 1: Select a word at random, perhaps by opening the dictionary with your eyes closed and touching the tip of a pencil to the page. The best words are simple, visual, and offer lots of opportunities for connections and association.

Step 2: Think up as many different words associated with your random word as you can. If your word is bottle, think of the different uses of bottles, different shapes, the ways people use bottles, how they are packaged, and so forth.

Step 3: Force some connections. For example, bottles can be filled up. Are you letting the people around you fill up your head with ideas? Empty bottles make noise. How much of what you say amounts to just so much unproductive noise? Bottles are recyclable. What ideas can you adapt and reuse in different forms?

Step 4: List your ideas and think about them. Which ones are most interesting? Which have the greatest potential? Do this exercise on a regular basis, and you'll start seeing ideas and connections everywhere you look.



Venture out in search of inspiration

Inspiration doesn't always pop in right when you need it. Sometimes you've got to go out looking for it—or coax it into your brain. To invite inspiration into your life, and create an environment where it can relax and get comfortable, try some of these strategies:

- **Seek out new experiences.** This can be as simple as taking a new route to work or as extreme as skydiving or bungee jumping. Try something new, and immerse yourself in the experience to gain a fresh perspective on your world.
- **Listen to music.** Don't just put it on as background. Choose a CD you haven't listened to in a long time—or something totally new—and really listen to it. Imagine what the sound looks like, smells like, and tastes like.
- **Read some quotations.** The Web, like any edition of

Bartlett's, is full of thoughts from people famous and obscure on all kinds of subjects—intellectual, whimsical, practical, humorous. Let the ideas expressed in quotations settle into your mind and let them shape your thinking.

- **Pay attention to your feelings.** Emotions can push you in unexpected directions if you're sensitive to them. What makes you happy? Angry? Sad? Often a desire to create a certain feeling, or overcome one, can suggest new ways of thinking.

- **Watch people.** Sit in your favourite coffee shop and watch the other customers (without being creepy about it, of course). Imagine their lives: Why are they here? What are they thinking? What secrets do they have? This can give you more empathy and understanding for other people.

For Renoir, Paint Trumped Pain

Although Henri Matisse was nearly 28 years younger than Auguste Renoir, the two great artists were dear friends and frequent companions.

When Renoir was confined to his home during the last decade of his life, Matisse visited him daily. Renoir, almost paralyzed by arthritis, continued to paint in spite of his infirmities.

One day as Matisse watched the elder painter working in his studio, fighting torturous pain with each brush stroke, he blurted out: "Auguste, why do you continue to paint when you are in such agony?"

Renoir answered simply: "The beauty remains; the pain passes."

And so, almost to his dying day, Renoir put paint to canvas. One of his most famous paintings, "The Bathers," was completed just two years before his passing, 14 years after he was stricken by the disabling disease.

Happiness is catching

If you want to be happy, try getting close to other happy people. Happiness isn't just an experience or choice, reports a study in the *British Medical Journal*. It depends on how happy those directly and indirectly connected to you are, and requires close proximity in order to spread. For instance, if you have a happy friend who lives within a mile of you, you're 25 percent more likely to be happy yourself, the researchers say. Proximity is key: A person is 42 percent more likely to be happy if a friend who is happy lives less than half a mile away. The effect declines the farther away a happy friend is.

Irish toasts

May your blessings outnumber the
shamrocks that grow,
And may trouble avoid you
wherever you go.

May your home always be
too small to hold all your friends.

Here's to a long life and a merry one.
A quick death and an easy one.
A pretty girl and an honest one.
A cold beer and another one!

