



How Often Do You Run Out of Gas?

By [M.J. Clark](#), MA, APR

A high school girl squeals her tires in the school parking lot, and the teacher on duty flags her down.

“What are you doing?!” the teacher asks rhetorically. “It’s dangerous to speed in the parking lot! You might hit someone.”

“But I’m almost out of gas, and I was trying to get to the gas station quickly.”

“Do you realize,” says the teacher, “that if you drive really fast, you only use more gas than if you just drove carefully to the gas station?”

This was a real-life example that my client John (fictitious name) thought of as we discussed how running yourself too hard only leads to poor decision making and eventually burn out. John is a high school principal, and he is working hard to spend time being still to spark his creativity, manage his stress and think more clearly. He gave his permission for me to share our conversation in our newsletter.

Like the car racing out of the parking lot, we often work frantically to get things done, only to run out of gas faster than if we just took our time and approached things with a more focused and controlled pace. John and I discussed why our best ideas often come to us in the shower, on a long drive or while hiking on a trail. When we finally let our mind rest, it sparks our creativity and allows us to focus. When our mind is racing in a hundred different directions, we can’t focus well enough to really be effective.

Continuing with our metaphor, our conversation then turned to what we do to maintain our car. Think of all the ways we care for our car: changing the oil, washing the windshield, vacuuming the interior, checking air pressure in the tires. Just as we care for our car, so should we care for ourselves. One thing John does is take 10-15 minutes each day to just sit in his office, with the door closed, and just be. He breathes, he thinks, he de-stresses. It sounds like so little time, but this time each day has become very precious to him. He told me it helps him slow down his day, which helps him focus on the most important things instead of just putting out fires all day, which is easy for someone in his role to do.

Do you feel at times like you’re just spinning your wheels? Are you simply speeding your way through life on the road to burnout? It may be time to drive carefully to the gas station and fill up again before you run out of gas.