

Stock Doc: More Sunlight, Higher Returns

Use the increased sunlight from daylight-saving time to boost your afternoon output.

BY ALDEN CASS

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On the morning of March 11, I awoke to the drone of my alarm clock feeling a great deal more tired than usual. It felt a bit like jet lag, but I was able to get going with a shower and a large (I refuse to use the term *venti* on principle alone) cup of **Starbucks** coffee.

As I wandered back to my apartment, it occurred to me that I had lost an hour of sleep. In an effort to conserve energy and resources, we were recently granted an earlier-than-normal daylight-saving time by the government.

The following morning, I growled as I silenced my alarm clock at 6 a.m. Still feeling a bit like I took a red-eye on **JetBlue** the night before, I completed my morning routine and made it to work. It was time to get moving with my high-powered brokers and traders who rush to their desks to start their research before the opening trading bell.

Throughout the morning, various traders came to me looking for new ways to foster accountability and emotional discipline in both work and private lives. Trading woes had been incurred because of bad decisions made for positions in various stocks. They needed answers and solutions to solidify their trading mojo before the day began. Despite having one less hour of sleep to energize me, I

was up for the task at hand.

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At the time of publication, Alden Cass had no positions in stocks mentioned. Cass is a performance enhancement coach and clinical psychologist for Catalyst Strategies Group (www.catsg.com) who specializes in working directly with individual and teams of senior investment executives, including high-profile CEOs, top hedge fund and prop traders, investors, and financial advisors to help them achieve their financial and personal goals. He works to modify behaviors that are hampering their performance and to give them the mental edge within competitive work environments. He is a licensed clinical psychologist and an expert on the use of psychology in the financial services industry. He has conducted behavioral healthcare studies on retail stockbrokers that indicated that 23 percent of the group measured met criteria for major depression. His research has been presented at both national and international conferences (APA, ICPP). He is a major contributor to columns in On Wall Street Magazine and Traderdaily.com. Cass has also conducted workshops with the Securities Industry Association, Money Management Institute, Trader Monthly Magazine's Peak Performance Workshop, The Wall Street Branch Managers Meeting at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, and the London Bullion Market Association, the Silver & Zinc Association, the Investment Management Consultants Association (IMCA), and the Investment Products Association (IPA).

He has appeared in the following media: The Today Show, Fox News Live, New York Magazine, Businessweek, Lou Dobbs Moneyline CNN, CNN money.com, CNBC London, Financial Times, London Financial Weekly, Washington Post Radio, NY Newsday, On Wall Street Magazine, E-Trade "On Air," BBC Radio, Reuter's Business Newswire, New York Times, Boston Globe, Absolute Return Magazine.

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Around 4 p.m., I began designing a new brochure for one of my latest projects working with people whose lives have been limited by mental illness and addiction. I was surprised to find that I had some extra momentum at an hour during which I normally would start dragging.

I looked out of the window in my office and noticed that it was still bright and sunny. I felt a rush of energy that I hadn't experienced since late summer, when we still had warm weather. Time flew by, and I was extremely productive while making follow-up phone calls and barreling through the endless paperwork.

It occurred to me that during the past four months I had become more prone to procrastination around 4 p.m. Even while I jotted down my case notes, my mind was already at home in front of the TV, ready for my daily dose of "Mad Money."

This past week we watched bullish sentiment reappear after finally overtaking some bearish uprisings. My clients reported to me that all week they had been able to work longer hours whether as traders, doctors or lawyers.

They felt an increase in their ability to focus after 3 p.m., remaining upbeat and getting more mileage out of their "emotional tanks." They also felt energized enough to make it to the gym, to be more involved as a parent/spouse and to keep their appointments with me. The extra sunlight led to increased motivation, which resulted in increased returns in their chosen professions.

The Psychology of Sunlight

It is a well-documented fact that sunlight can have a mood-elevating impact on the human brain. Without it, and especially in the winter, people can develop what is referred to as Seasonal Affective Disorder. SAD is a form of depression typically caused by a decrease in the neurotransmitter serotonin, which is responsible for our moods.

As sunlight sparks an increase in serotonin, our moods can shift into overdrive, making us feel like we have more energy, motivation and focus. If one can harness this energy properly, almost any goal or task can be accomplished.

So while the world conserves its energy, take advantage of your resources after 4 p.m. and stay focused on the prize. Take in as much sunlight as you can during your workday and watch your business soar.

Please write to the Stock Doc with your trading, emotional or investing dilemmas. Dr. Cass always welcomes comments and stories, for which he'll try to offer valuable solutions in later columns.

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