

know how

Get a Handle on It

Whether you're faced with inane party chatter or a stolen wallet, here's **how to deal with life's dicier moments**

"TO HANDLE" literally means to get a grip. That means not seething when you're stranded at the airport indefinitely, not being embarrassed that the loss of your beloved Bowser has left you devastated, and not hiding under the covers because you got a pimple on the day of your 40th-birthday bash. Life is filled with seemingly insurmountable challenges that, with a cool head and the right information, turn out to be manageable. It really is humanly possible to live through your first day of work—and a nasty hangover (though maybe not if they happen at the same time). What follows is a guide to the doable.

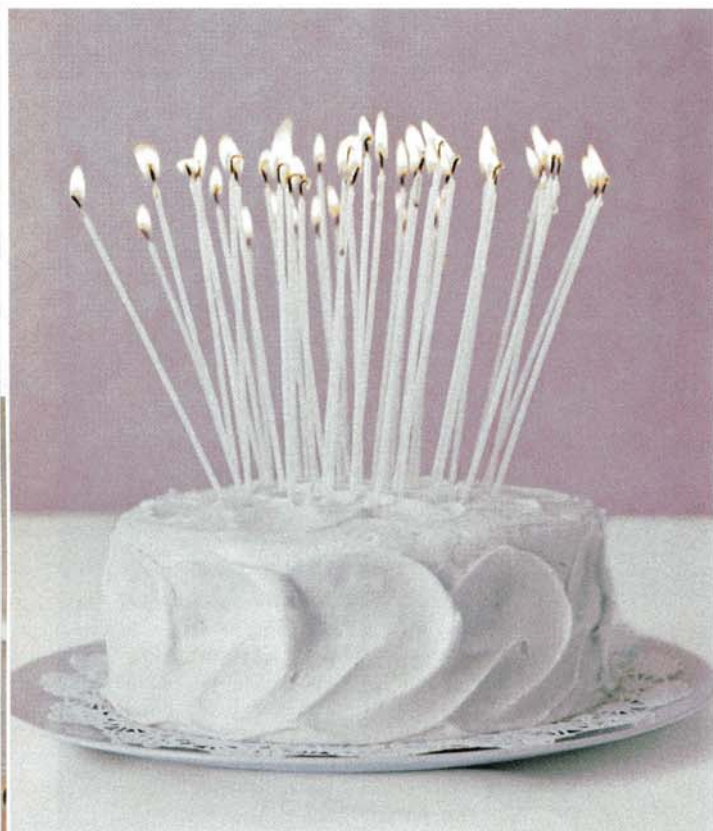
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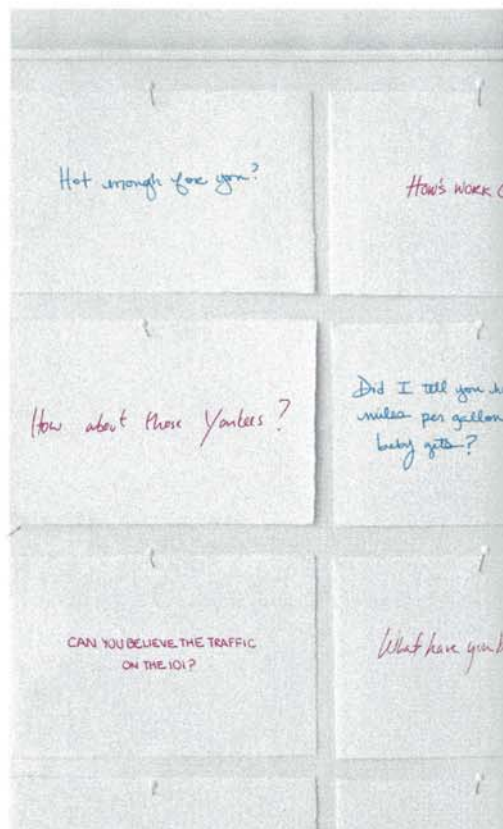
“Sophistication might be described as the ability to cope gracefully with a situation involving the presence of a formidable menace to one's poise and prestige.”

James Thurber, *The New Yorker*
(August 1930)



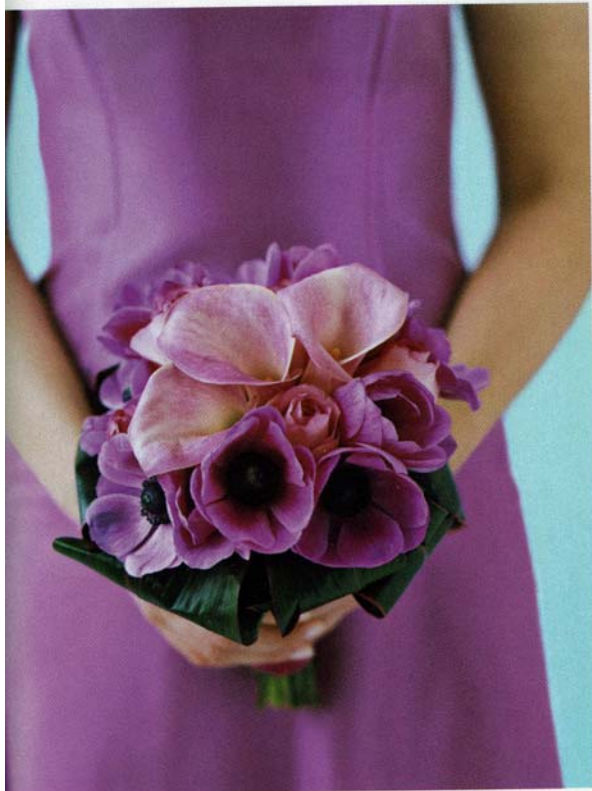
A Milestone Birthday

Mark Twain once said that wrinkles should merely indicate where smiles have been. So instead of seeing a plastic surgeon for a round-number birthday, why not celebrate your smiles? Party planner Colin Cowie likes to mark milestones with rituals. "They focus energy on the person being celebrated," he says. "At a friend's 40th birthday, I asked each guest to write a birthday wish on a piece of silk, then tied the pieces together and draped the knotted garland through the branches of a tree," under which everyone ate dinner. He has also asked guests to write wishes on cards, then placed the cards in a beautiful box for the host. If the above sounds too festive for your mood, Kansas City, Missouri, psychoanalyst Marilyn Metzl says to "go someplace special that you've always wanted to visit." Patty Marx, author of *You Know You're 40 When...* (Broadway, \$9), suggests New Zealand, explaining, "With the time difference, you might be able to miss the birthday altogether."



Bad Small Talk

Socialite Nina Griscom, who averages three parties a week, is so often held hostage by boring chatter that she has devised escape strategies, among them excusing herself to make a business call and pulling a friend into a conversation. "I like the buddy system," Griscom says. "I'll use a friend as a buffer to avoid a situation, or as a foil when I'm in one." Lesley Carlin, coauthor of the *Etiquette Grrls* books, suggests an artful dodge. "If someone is going on about soccer, ask a personal question, like 'How did you get interested in sports?'" she says. "You may find he once lived in Argentina, and suddenly you have something to talk about." Alex Blumberg, a producer for the radio show *This American Life*, relies on similar interviewing techniques. "If a person makes a throwaway comment about politics, I'll challenge him by saying, 'Really? I don't see it that way,'" he says. "Or I scratch the surface and ask him what he *really* thinks—that's when it gets interesting."



Not Being Chosen

Being passed over, whether for a promotion or the chance to be a bridesmaid, can transport people back to being the last one picked for kickball. But everyone is "not chosen" at some point. Take Tom Brady, the New England Patriot who was famously not chosen until the sixth round of the 2000 NFL draft yet became the youngest quarterback ever to lead his team to win three Super Bowls. Sheenah Hankin, author of *Complete Confidence: A Handbook* (Regan, \$25), follows his example: "Don't focus on your shortcomings—make sure you're picked next time," she says. "If it's a job, ask, 'What do I need to do to get it? A headhunter? Another degree?' Then do that." Acknowledge your disappointment, says David B. Spano, director of the counseling center at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. "Then counter it by recalling times you were chosen," he says. "When a block is put in front of us, we have to change direction—which often leads to a surprisingly good outcome."



A Cold

When cabaret singer Andrea Marcovicci, who performs 150 shows a year, catches a cold, "it's an emergency," she says. If she misses a gig, she can lose a huge chunk of salary. So at the first snuffle or tickle, she uses Zicam, a homeopathic nose spray that's available at drugstores, and drinks Airborne, a vitamin-packed effervescent herbal tablet that's dropped into a glass of water. She also believes in old-school remedies, like plenty of liquids and bed rest, which Larry Fields, M.D., president-elect of the American Academy of Family Physicians, says are the best strategy. "Taking care to get more rest and conserve energy allows your body to concentrate on combating the illness," he says. As Marcovicci rests, she makes the most of her downtime. "I like to drop eucalyptus essential oil on the bathroom tiles as I'm taking a steaming-hot shower," she says. "It opens up my nose and chest and makes me feel like I'm at a spa rather than home sick."

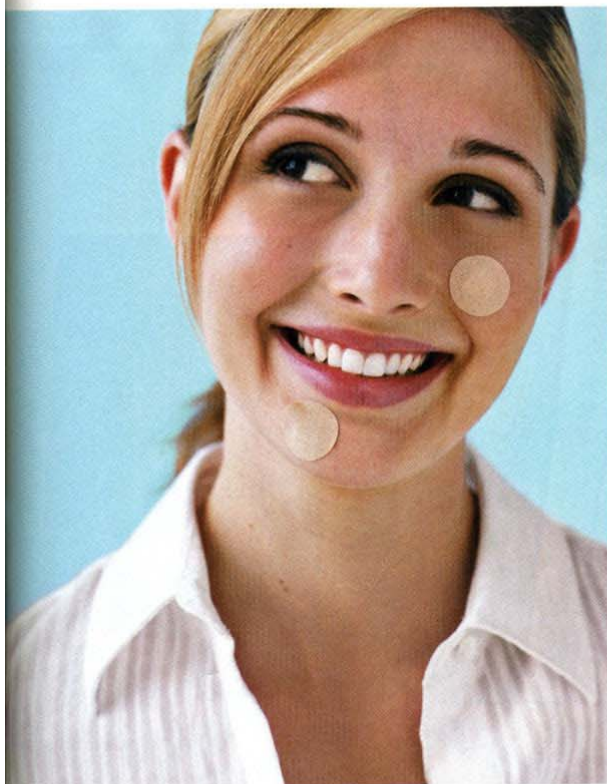


The First Day on a New Job

Even if you've tried on three different outfits and arrived at the office absurdly early, don't let on that you're nervous. "I tell my clients to smile, regardless of how they're feeling," says Daniel Welch, president of CV Enterprises, a Brooklyn-based recruiting firm. Coming across as a confident team player is vital. "Introduce yourself to colleagues, and tell them you're excited to work with them," Welch says. "And memorize names quickly." That makes it easier to ask questions, another key. "Reaching out to coworkers reassures them that you value their experience," says Debbie Mayer, head of recruiting for a technology company in New York City. Bring proof of citizenship for your I-9 form and a makeup kit for the company badge photo. Your clothes should err on the side of understated. "One woman wore a miniskirt and clunky shoes her first day," Mayer recalls. She was known as the clunky-shoe girl for years. "First impressions," Welch agrees, "can make or break you."

A Hangover

Salted cucumber juice, a glass of heavy cream, and pickled sheep's eye with tomato juice are among the tried-and-not-necessarily-true hangover cures practiced worldwide. Thankfully, since research shows that light-to-moderate drinkers average 10 hangovers a year, there are some scientifically proven and less foul remedies. Jeffrey G. Wiese, M.D., a professor at the Tulane University School of Medicine, in New Orleans, treats a hangover like the flu. "Alcohol dehydrates you," he says. He suggests tackling the dehydration by doubling your liquid intake, preferably with an electrolyte-enhanced sports drink. And if you're not feeling queasy, take aspirin (but not acetaminophen or ibuprofen, which might cause liver or stomach problems if taken after drinking). Sant Singh, M.D., a professor at the Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, in Chicago, recommends glucose-packed fruit juices or sodium-rich tomato juice. "But if you have the luxury," Wiese says, "your best bet is to go back to bed."



A Pimple

If diamonds are a girl's best friend, then pimples are her worst enemy—especially when they show up just in time for an important event. For those not inclined to see a dermatologist for an emergency treatment involving sharp metal instruments and cortisone, Gervaise Gerstner, M.D., of Wexler Dermatology, in Manhattan, suggests a dab of toothpaste to dry out the pimple. New York City makeup artist Maria Verel prefers icing the area for a similar effect. "Then hold a cotton pad soaked in allergy-relief eyedrops on the spot for five minutes," she says. Gerstner concurs: "The vasoconstrictors in the drops shrink blood vessels, which reduces redness." For small pimples, use a product containing salicylic acid. Almay Clear Complexion Blemish Healing Spot Concealer (\$7 at drugstores) both dries out and covers up. Verel likes Benefit's Galactic Shield! and, for bigger bumps, Boo Boo Zap! (both \$18, available at www.sephora.com). Zap that zit and nothing will distract from your party dress.



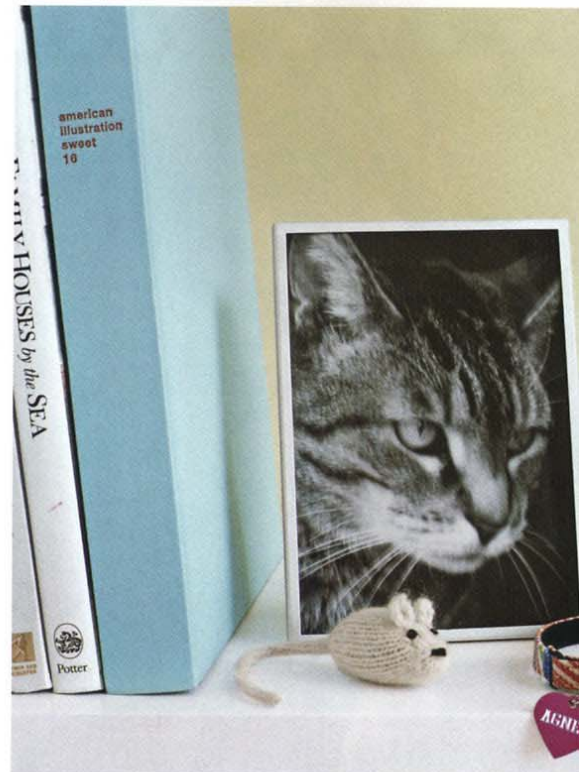
A Lost or Stolen Wallet

When you first realize your wallet is missing, "retrace your steps," advises Lieutenant Jan Easterling of the Dallas Police Department. Often cash is plucked and the wallet dumped. Next, says Susan Howley, a director of public policy at the National Center for Victims of Crime, in Washington, D.C., "call the local precinct and file a police report. And get that report number, for the bank and credit-card companies." Then, if you have an American Express card, call Amex. For \$29 a year, the company will cancel all your ATM and credit cards, arrange for new ones, flag your accounts with a fraud alert, and even (in some states) replace your driver's license and passport—saving you hours of waiting on hold. Otherwise, Howley says, cancel and replace each card on your own. Then contact all three major credit bureaus (Equifax, 800-685-1111; Experian, 888-397-3742; Trans Union, 800-916-8800). Each will file a fraud alert and send you a free credit report to monitor suspicious activity.



Getting Stuck in an Airport

National Public Radio contributor Harriet Baskas has made a career of being stranded—her experiences inspired her book *Stuck at the Airport* (Fireside, \$13). Her first tip: “Don’t sit and stew.” Find the information booth to see what the airport has to offer. There may be an observation deck with views or a place to get a massage, like the one at Washington Dulles. The main airport in Austin, Texas, hosts local bands, and San Francisco’s shows art from the city’s museums. If you have access to a computer, log on to www.sleepinginairports.com for snoozing tips. Or check out Baskas’s airport reviews at www.expedia.com. She also suggests asking at the hotel kiosks about day rates: “You can steam, swim laps, or go for a run.” Peter Maass, a contributing writer at *The New York Times Magazine*, often pays for peace and quiet, snacks, Internet access, and comfy chairs. “In many hub airports,” he says, “you can use first-class lounges even if you’re not a member for a onetime fee of \$50 or so.”



The Death of a Pet

When you lose a pet, it’s important to surround yourself with people who sympathize. The last thing you need to hear is “Get a hold of yourself—he was just a dog!” “People often grieve more for a lost pet than for a human being,” says Nancy Peterson, an issues specialist for the Humane Society in Washington, D.C. “Who else is so happy to see you after you’ve taken out the garbage?” If no one seems to understand the depth of your grief, go to www.petloss.com for kindred spirits. Or call the ASPCA hotline (800-946-4646, PIN 1407211); Stephanie LaFarge, Ph.D., director of counseling services, will call you back. “People are often embarrassed by their grief,” LaFarge says. “I tell them it’s totally normal.” She also tells them that memorializing a pet by leaving a photo, a leash, a toy, or a bowl around helps ease the pain. As for when to replace a pet, LaFarge recommends waiting at least a month. For some people, she says, getting a new pet can be “as complicated as beginning to date after a divorce.”

Go to www.realsimple.com/sleep for more advice on handling life’s little problems.