

BALANCE

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Ask “What” not “Why”

Although everyone experiences stress, the natural response to sudden and unexpected stressful events is often frustration and a belief that these things can be avoided if only we knew how. Some stress we can't control well, such as our response to natural disasters or rising gas prices, but the reality is that most stress is caused by our negative thoughts in response to situations and events. The good news is that we can control the way we think. To intervene quicker and experience less stress, ask yourself, “What can I do to manage this situation?” Ask this question sooner, and use it as a key health management strategy. This strategy takes you out of the victim role that emphasizes helplessness—the most stressful feeling of all.

Making a Good Habit Stick

What causes good habits? The simple answer is repetition. We need good habits to reach our goals, whether it is better time management, being more organized, or exercising regularly. Bad habits keep us from reaching our potential. Ben Franklin once wrote, “It is easier to prevent bad habits than to break them.” However, it is also true that good habits are difficult to break! Recognize the benefits a new habit brings. Choose steps that will help you develop the new habit. Repeat the steps often enough that they become second nature. For motivation, reward yourself as you develop your new habit. Good habits protect us by making good use of the human tendency to fall into consistent patterns of behavior. Take advantage of this trait and take your life where you want it to go.

Diversity of Generations at Work

Social scientists have identified four unique generations within today's workforce:

- 1) Veterans
(born between 1922 and 1945)
- 2) Baby Boomers
(born between 1946 and 1964)
- 3) Generation X
(born between 1965 and 1980)
- 4) Generation Y
(born between 1980 and 2000)

Generally, each of these generations possesses different general values, ways of communicating, goals and ideas about how to get things done. A workforce made of a combination of these generations provides creativity, risk taking, different experiences and a varied knowledge base. However, these differing views can also collide when trying to build teamwork, deal with change, increase productivity, motivate others and maintain employee retention. How do you merge the best of what everyone has to offer? First, understand that how each person communicates is determined by the generation they belong to. Before jumping to conclusions about what your coworker just said, try seeing things from his or her point of view. Chances are you will learn something from the diversity found in others' communication. Once you understand these differences, you can increase your productivity and satisfaction on the job by anticipating their influence in day-to-day communication.



Take Breaks that Energize You

The way you spend your breaks can either energize you or sap your strength. If you take a brisk walk around the block for 15 minutes in the morning and again midafternoon, the fresh air and exercise will get you going and make you feel refreshed. You'll be more alert and feel a sense of well-being. If you prefer, devote your morning break to physical exercise and your afternoon break to mental exercise. Get a brainteaser book and do a fun puzzle to get your mind stimulated. Flexing your mental muscles can carry over into your work and help you think more creatively. On the other hand, if you habitually smoke and drink caffeinated beverages during your breaks, you will undermine your health. Any temporary pleasure they provide will be offset by the long-term harm they cause.

Plan Ahead to Battle Burnout

You might think that burnout is an inevitable part of your career. But is it? One-fourth of all employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives, according to Northwestern National Life. Burnout can in fact be avoided by being proactive in your daily life and dealing with stress head-on. Planning early and deciding on intervention options is the first step in preventing chronic, toxic stress and burnout. Keep a diary for two weeks and inventory what's causing your stress. Then sort the list into three categories:

- 1) stressful relationships
- 2) things in the work environment that stress you out
- 3) behaviors you practice that cause you stress

While you may not have much control over the first two categories, you have a lot of control over the last one. Ask your EAP how it can help.

On-time Tactics Fight Procrastination

Employees with a reputation for getting things done on time are held in high esteem by others because they never have to be reminded about a task to complete or a deadline to meet. If you struggle with procrastination, the following on-time tactics could improve your reputation almost overnight:

- 1) When you are assigned a project or take on a task, immediately spend a few minutes considering what's involved. Don't put it aside.
- 2) Quickly notify people who depend on you when they can expect completion. This puts you under pressure to stay on task and works better than the alternative—the “prompt and react” method. This approach, used by many employees to get things done, relies upon reacting to the “system” prompting you to act—an anxious phone call from a coworker, a boss sending out a stern reminder or a demand from an angry customer who needs something “yesterday.”

Share Information

Failure to share information is an ongoing cause of conflict among coworkers. Information is knowledge and controlling information brings power to the person having the information. This explains the desire of some to withhold information. A person is more likely to share information if they see themselves as a team player and feel good about keeping others informed. Sharing information creates teamwork, reduces secrecy and distrust, encourages a noncompetitive work environment and increases everyone's productivity. To ensure that information is shared among your work group, create a time to share information on a regular basis, acknowledge the importance of information sharing and recognize, with appreciation, the people who share information.

Ten Habits for a Healthier Sleep

Almost everyone has trouble sleeping at times. For some people, it happens only occasionally; for others, it feels like it happens all the time. Researchers are now finding evidence that there is a strong link between long-term sleep problems and one's physical and mental health. To help you get a healthier sleep, adopt these ten sleep habits:

- 1) Go to bed to sleep and wake up at the same times every day. Your body will adjust to this regular sleep/awake cycle, making it easier to fall asleep.
- 2) Use your bedroom for bedroom activities only—move your TV and computer out of the room and don't bring work or projects into the bedroom.
- 3) Establish a sleeping environment that works for you—make sure the room is dark, quiet and the temperature is comfortable for sleeping. Consider the size of your bed, your mattress, pillows and covers—do they provide the comfort you need?
- 4) Establish a bedtime routine that helps you wind down from your day. Relaxation tapes, soft music, reading, a warm bath, or gentle stretches work for some people.
- 5) Avoid napping during the day if you have trouble going to sleep at night. If you do nap, don't do so after 3 p.m. and don't nap for longer than 20-30 minutes.
- 6) Avoid stimulants—caffeinated coffee, tea, soft drinks and chocolate—in the six to eight hours before bedtime.
- 7) Avoid alcohol in the three to four hours before bedtime. Alcohol may help you get to sleep but it also disrupts your sleep in the last half of the night—it increases the number of times you wake up.
- 8) Watch what you eat and how much you eat in the three to four hours before bedtime. Eating a large meal near bedtime can keep you awake. For some people, eating spicy foods or foods with a lot of tomato can cause heartburn or indigestion that only gets worse when they lie down. A small snack or warm milk before bedtime may ward off hunger and help you sleep through the night.
- 9) Develop a regular exercise routine, preferably aerobic exercise, but don't do it too close to bedtime (in the two to three hours before bedtime).
- 10) If you smoke, quit. Nicotine is a stimulant and research indicates that nicotine use makes it difficult to both fall asleep and wake up. Smokers may be more prone to nightmares, snoring, congestion, and breathing difficulties—all of which affect the quality and quantity of sleep.

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Family Meetings

If your life seems so rushed that it feels like you are passing family members like ships in the night, consider setting up regular family meetings. Family meetings can be a time together to discuss important issues in everyone's life and stay connected with each other. Some tips for successful family meetings include:

- Carve out a regular time that fits with everyone's schedule and make the meetings official.
- Establish three group traditions-
 - ✓ No interrupting another person who is talking.
 - ✓ No using shared information against a family member.
 - ✓ No using family meetings that only talk about difficult or emotional topics. Mix family meetings with positive and enjoyable topics or plans.
- Keep a diary. It will provide an exciting and thoughtful look back over the years.
- Make meetings enjoyable—by having snacks, by including fun things to do or sharing humor, by changing the meeting location.

Video Violence

Youth who play violent video games show an increase in aggressive thoughts and behavior as well as angry feelings, according to the American Psychological Association (APA). APA research shows that violent games may also reduce a child's helpful behavior and ability to be sympathetic or caring to a victim of violence. Showing violent acts but not the consequences of such acts teaches children that violence is an effective way to resolve conflict. When a child sees and understands pain and suffering as a result of a violent act, his or her aggressive behavior is lessened. In addition to limiting exposure to violence, adults can help children understand violence by teaching them how to view violent television and video games—help them understand what happens when someone gets injured on television or in games, versus in real life.

Source: American Psychological Association, August 17, 2005

To speak with an EAP professional,
please call: **800.765.0770**

