

Working Solutions

Finish What You Start

Have you ever noticed how a lot of what you deal with on a daily basis actually happened some time previously? You find yourself not immersed in the new and exciting, but bogged down in the old and outdated. For example:

- That big pile of magazines you ordered, but never have time to read?
- The high protein diet you started, but now you eat carbs and just feel guilty?
- That bathroom remodel that still needs the baseboards installed?
- Those 80's clothes clogging your closet that you have to fight through every morning?
- Taxes from years ago that need filing?
- The birthday/wedding/baby gift you still haven't bought and sent?
- The apology you owe a friend?

Are you getting the idea? All these things tie you to the past—literally. And the worst part is, if you're tied to the past, it's likely that your past—not what you want now—is controlling your actions today.

For example, do you skip family gatherings or after work parties because you feel uncomfortable around someone who made some irritating remarks? Do you feel anxious and depressed because your child's birthday is coming soon and you don't have the extra money in the budget to buy that new bike? Do you bark at your husband—or yourself—every time you look at the shelves he started but didn't finish in your daughter's room? If this sounds like you, it's no wonder you feel like you get up every morning wearing concrete shoes! Not only do you have to deal with what the day brings, but you are carrying a backpack full of

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yesterday's leftovers. And every day that you allow more and more to accumulate, it gets heavier and heavier.

Today, think about how much easier your life would be if you made just one commitment: **Finish what you start.** All it takes is three simple steps:

1. **Make a new commitment** that any new thing you start will be completely finished, either by declaring an end to it, doing it yourself, or delegating the job to someone else.
2. **Start to clean up FULLY** (this is key!) anything that happened in the past that still nags at you. Be patient, but persistent. Use the list above as examples, but carefully consider things from your own life. You can usually identify these things by how they make you feel when you see them or think about them—sad, mad, guilty, or embarrassed.

As you go along, **remember to set up a new ideal for living**—a way of living that finishes what you started. For example, if you're still paying off last Christmas, determine that you will handle next Christmas in a different way.

3. **Seek help when you need it**, instead of just letting it drag you down. Ask for what you need from others. Explain what you are doing in a kind way, and ask them to join you. Ask to be replaced on the committee that takes too much time, ask your hubby to finish the shelves (don't just complain!), get professional help with the taxes.

People who are aware of the present, and looking forward to the future are able to seize upon opportunities. People who are brooding over the past are blinded to present possibilities, and therefore lose future potentials. Which one of those people do you want to be? ■ *Source: Wier, Hershey. (n.d.). Finish what you start. Retrieved August 24, 2005, <http://www.lifeorganizers.com/spirit-mind/finish-what-you-start.htm>.*

Exercise Even If You Smoke

Don't put off your fight to quit smoking ahead of starting an exercise program. Start exercising now—especially if you smoke. Exercise could help delay the deterioration of your lungs from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Smoking and exercise are not great go-together activities, but a large research study found that those with COPD had less deterioration of lung functioning from the disease if they maintained moderate to high levels of exercise. Call AWP at 800-343-3822 for referrals to helpful stop-smoking resources in your community. ■ *Source: American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.*



Mental Health Day...Again?

Harris Interactive's annual survey of unscheduled absences shows that unscheduled days off by employees are higher now than at any time since 1999. Unscheduled absences include personal illness, but only 30% of employees reported really being sick. Instead, they report taking time off due to family issues, personal needs, stress, or because they simply felt they "deserved" it. The key indicator linked to unscheduled absences in the survey was low morale in the work unit. Unscheduled absences, or "mental health days," may feel like a quick fix, but it is not the cure that you and your EAP could discover together by discussing issues that are troubling you. Give AWP a call at 800-343-3822. We can help. ■ *Source: Unscheduled Absences Survey 2006, Harris Interactive.*



Anger Management

If simply counting to ten doesn't keep you from flying off the handle, count to five instead. Say what you don't like in a calm manner, and then state what it is you want. Try to identify the earliest sign of your impending outburst, whether it's pacing, feverishly tapping your foot, or something else. Pinpointing the signs can help you apply personal control over anger before you blow your top. If you need help controlling your anger or need help dealing with your feelings about someone else's anger, call AWP at 800-343-3822. We can help. ■

Families Facing Deployment Stress

Military families may experience deployment stress

that results from separation, uncertain communications, uncertain reunification, and challenges faced by one parent playing the part of two. Emotional problems can increase during deployment periods if the family has had a recent history of struggles prior to deployment, is a young family experiencing its first deployment separation, or has recently moved to a new duty station. If you or your family is affected, be sure to identify resources in the community that are available to support you with this special burden. Do not allow the stigma or the embarrassment of needing mental health support impede your decision to get help. AWP can help. Call us 24 hours a day at 800-343-3822. ■



Office Politics: How to Cope

Choose better strategies for coping with office politics. 1) Practice compartmentalization—be totally professional at work and rely less on work for your most important social needs. This will help you detach and stay out of the political fray. 2) Maintain your employer's perspective—put the employer's needs first. 3) Think win-win—it will cure almost any bad habit associated with negativity, criticism, defensiveness, provocation, or the inability to be assertive with coworkers. ■

Pathways to Powerful Public Speaking

Meet your goal of becoming an effective public speaker by understanding what is included



in good public speaking and recognizing a couple of myths. The most common roadblock to public speaking is fear of making a mistake or of embarrassment. What you may not know is that the key to great public speaking is not avoiding these things, but overcoming them with class when they happen.

For some public speakers, normal mistakes become spontaneous entertainment and can add to their desirability as speakers. Try incorporating the following desirable traits of public speakers or use it as a checklist to assemble your presentation; you will increase the likelihood of getting invited back as well as earning a good reputation.

- ❑ **Enlighten your audience** with things they don't know about or connections they have not made regarding your topic;
- ❑ **Entertain with your presentation** (not the same as a joke) to keep people focused;
- ❑ **Provoke thought in your audience** by what you say or offer;
- ❑ **Educate and provide useful information** your listeners have not heard before, which can be applied to their lives once they leave;
- ❑ **Add a story to illustrate a point;** and
- ❑ **Be appropriate but provocative** in material you present.

There are hundreds of resources on improving public speaking, and the tips above are only a sample of what's out there. Consider talking to AWP about your fear of public speaking or to discover additional resources we would recommend to help you reach your goal. Call AWP at 800-343-3822. ■

Do-It-Yourself Conflict Resolution

Learning some simple conflict resolution

techniques can prevent minor conflicts with coworkers from turning into larger disputes.



One such technique is “validating,” which means acknowledging the feelings of the coworker with whom you have a disagreement. This technique takes practice because you will feel like you are “giving in” to the other person’s point of view. However, validation is not about putting aside your disagreement. Instead, you are acknowledging that the other person’s point of view is respected and understood. The more you can zero in on your coworker’s feelings, the better. For example, rather than saying, “Forget it, Jane! This project can’t wait until after the holidays,” start with, “Jane, are you feeling uneasy about rushing this project to completion before the holidays because it will put too much stress on our team?” This is not a psychological ploy. This is communication that throws game playing out the window and helps others feel respected—something all of us want from our coworkers at work. The outcome is higher productivity. ■

Welcome Criticism with an Open Mind

Impress your boss by listening to criticism and ask clarifying questions to confirm that you understand. Then map out a strategy to apply

their suggestions and follow through. Your ability to learn from even harsh or painful feedback—and act on it—will separate you from those who react defensively. Arguing only makes matters worse. If you think someone’s giving you invalid or misguided input, ask for examples in an earnest, nonthreatening tone. It’s fine to express genuine confusion about the criticism, but withhold final judgment until you allow others to cite evidence. Most important, don’t interrupt. Let the comments sink in before you respond. ■

Using Pen Power to Fight Stress

If you haven’t tried “expressive writing”

or “journal therapy” as a stress management technique,

maybe you should—more than one research study has supported its powerful



effects on well-being. The benefit appears to come from the technique’s ability to pinpoint the issues that trouble you most. Some professionals believe the process can help boost immune system function by reducing stress. The technique is to spend thirty minutes a day, a few times a week, writing whatever comes to your mind. The target of your pen could be your innermost thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, dreams—nothing is off limits. Grammar and spelling don’t matter. Don’t censor yourself. What counts is writing with the flow of your thoughts. ■

Your EAP is designed to help you deal with life stresses and a variety of personal challenges. For confidential services offered at no cost to all employees and their families, please call:

Alliance
work partners

Toll Free (800) 343-3822
TDD (800) 448-1823
Teen Line (800) 334-8336 (TEEN)
E-mail: eap@alliancewp.com
Web: www.alliancewp.com

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