

Balanced LIVING



Dealing with CRANKY CO-WORKERS

Cranky co-workers or bosses can make your work life difficult, but you can take steps to improve your situation.

“One of the hardest things for us to learn in our relationships — both work and personal — is that we can operate independently of other people’s bad moods, but we have to work at it. Unless you mentally immunize yourself, you can be infected by other people’s crankiness,” says Leslie Charles, author of “Why Is Everyone So Cranky?”

When you work with cranky people, you can choose to be happy instead of miserable by following this simple formula: Stop, look and listen, then respond.

STOP: “When something happens, ask yourself if this is a small, medium or large annoyance, and respond accordingly,” said Charles.

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STRESS & HEALTH

understanding the connection

Stress exists in your mind — but it’s also evident in your stomach, heart, muscles and even your toes.

“In fact, stress may affect every cell in your body,” says Ronald Glaser, Ph.D., a researcher at Ohio State University Medical School.

During stressful times, your body produces various chemicals, including cortisol, an immune-suppressing hormone. The more cortisol produced, the weaker your immune cells become and the more susceptible you are to illness.

“A one-day stressor isn’t going to make a big change in your risk of getting a cold, for example,” says Dr. Glaser. “But a chronic stressor that lasts a few weeks could dampen your immune response and create a risk of disease.”

Migraine headaches, sleep disorders, backaches, skin rashes, fatigue, irritability, headache, depression, worry, mood swings, chest pain, anxiety, upset stomach, ulcers, and high blood pressure are common reactions to stress. By gaining a better understanding of the stress/disease connection, you can reduce your stress and, in turn, improve your health and well-being.

No one can avoid all stress — and a certain amount is actually good for you. But it’s best to keep unhealthy levels in check.

Check out the steps on the next page to help you control everyday stress.

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CRANKY CO-WORKERS

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Don't respond to your co-worker with sarcasm, ridicule or anger, which will only escalate the problem. And don't take your boss' cranky remarks personally; stress often causes managers and supervisors to act crabby. Also, don't deplete your energy by obsessing about what you should have said.

LOOK: Observe when the crankiness occurs. Do you notice it most during a certain time of the day or on a particular day of the week? Does it occur when the person is dealing with a lot of work stress or personal hardship? Take note of when and where the crankiness occurs to identify any pattern, which will make the grouchy behavior more predictable and less threatening.

LISTEN: What's the cranky person's real message? Are you in any way part of the problem? Should you change something about your own behavior?

RESPOND: Although some people may purposefully use on-the-job crankiness to get their way, others can't help themselves. It's a reflection of their inner turmoil. In either case, don't remain silent.

Here's how to give an assertive, yet compassionate response:

STEP 1 — Agree

In a neutral tone of voice, agree with any part of the cranky person's statement that may be true, and ignore the false claims.

For example, if your boss complains you don't care about the company because you turned in your report late, reply with, "You're right, I did turn in my report late last week." Finding some part to agree with will calm the cranky person. Ignore the accusation that you don't care about the company.

STEP 2 — Reflect

Next, reflect on how the cranky person might be feeling by saying, "You seem frustrated," "It sounds like you're having a bad day" or "You look

like you're under a lot of stress." It will pleasantly surprise the grouch that someone else cares.

STEP 3 — Ask

In a neutral tone of voice say, "I don't like to be talked to in that way because it sounds angry and disrespectful. Would you please speak to me in a calmer tone of voice?"

CONSEQUENCES: Cranky people often continue behaving badly because their targets remain silent. By responding, you'll make the offender feel somewhat uncomfortable, and most people won't make changes until they experience such discomfort.

A HAPPIER YOU: No one can guarantee that cranky co-workers or managers will change, because it's not easy to change personality traits. If you take the above steps, however, you'll feel happier because you'll be standing up for yourself in a compassionate, respectful manner.

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STRESS/HEALTH connection

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Recognize your stress signals.

Once you're aware of your stressors, you'll have a better idea of when you're stressed and can take steps to reduce them. Notice when you're most vulnerable to stress and prepare. Are you most affected in the mornings? Mondays? In the winter?

Exercise.

Aerobic workouts — walking, cycling, swimming, or running — can release pent-up frustrations while producing endorphins, brain chemicals that counteract stress.

Eat a healthful diet.

A balanced diet can help stabilize your mood.

Communicate with friends and family.

Social ties relieve stress and contribute to a positive attitude.

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Spend time enjoying your hobbies.

Doing so allows you to focus on a pleasurable activity instead of your problems.

Try relaxation techniques.

Meditation, creative imagery, visualization, deep-breathing exercises, yoga and listening to relaxation tapes can help.

Learn to set limits.

Don't agree to unnecessary, stressful obligations.

Get enough sleep.

Stress interferes with relaxation, making it hard to get a good night's sleep, which can lead to fatigue and a reduced ability to cope. To get the best sleep possible, try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.

Steer clear of caffeine.

Caffeine can add to your anxiety, making you feel even more stressed. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Using

alcohol or other drugs to relieve stress only masks symptoms and can worsen stress in the long run.

Learn something new.

The excitement of learning something new, such as how to speak a different language or play a musical instrument, can make your worries seem far away.

Take a breather.

Stressful situations can make you breathe more shallowly or hold your breath. When you have to relax fast, belly breathing can be done in seconds.

To do it: Concentrate on making your abdomen move out as you inhale through your nose, then in as you exhale. Using imagery as you belly breathe can help you further deepen and slow the pace of your breathing. As you inhale, close your eyes and imagine the air swirling into your nose and down into your lungs. As you exhale, imagine the air swirling back out again.

COMBATING SIGNIFICANT STRESS.....

When faced with a highly stressful event in your life — perhaps the death of a loved one, a life-threatening illness or a serious financial loss — the following strategies will help you cope:

Avoid unnecessary changes in your life. Instead, reserve what energy you do have for dealing with the stressor at hand. If possible, stabilize your work and home environments while working out the primary problem.

Quiet your mind. In times of stress, the mind makes things seem worse than they are by creating endless versions of impending disaster. Because the body can't tell the difference between fact and fantasy, it responds with heightened physical response.

Keep in the present. You can calm both your mind and body by keeping your mind in the present, which is seldom as stressful as an imagined future or regrettable past. To keep your mind in the present, focus your attention on your breathing, a sound or visual pattern, a repetitive movement, or meditation. Courageously and aggressively face the stressor. Resist any temptation to ignore it. Instead, carefully

appraise the seriousness of the problem without magnifying it out of proportion. In addition, confirm your view of the stressor by talking with others. Make a special effort to speak to family, friends, or co-workers who have dealt with similar experiences.

Take inventory of your coping responses. Confidence is a valuable ally in combating stress, and it builds on memories of past successes. Review successes you've had with other stressful life situations. Recall some of the specific things you did to cope.

Commit yourself to a reasonable course of action to deal with the stressor. Action is a powerful stress reducer. Research shows the body lowers its production of epinephrine, a powerful stress hormone, when a person shifts into action.

Take time out to relax. At least once or twice a day, take time to decompress by relaxing — perhaps by listening to soothing music, taking a walk, gardening, reading or exercising.

What is **INTERNET ADDICTION?**



Internet addiction is described as an impulse control disorder which does not involve use of an intoxicating drug and is very similar to pathological gambling.

Signs of Internet addiction include the following:

- **Preoccupation with the Internet.** (Thoughts about previous online activity or anticipation of the next online session.)
- **Use of the Internet in increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction.**
- **Repeated, unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop Internet use.**
- **Feelings of restlessness, moodiness, depression or irritability when attempting to cut down use of the Internet.**
- **Online longer than originally intended.**
- **Jeopardized or risked loss of significant relationships, job, educational or career opportunities because of Internet use.**
- **Lies to family members, counselor, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet.**
- **Use of the Internet as a way to escape from problems or to relieve a dysphoric mood.** (E.g., feelings of hopelessness, guilt, anxiety, depression.)

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY INTERNET ADDICTION

Internet addiction results in personal, family, academic, financial and occupational problems that are characteristic of other addictions. Impairment of real life relationships are disrupted as a result of excessive use of the Internet. Internet addicts spend more time in solitary seclusion and spend less time with real people in their lives. Arguments may result due to the volume of time spent on-line. Internet addicts may attempt to conceal the amount of time spent on-line, which results in distrust and the disturbance of quality in once stable relationships.

Financial problems may occur due to the significant amount of time spent online and the service provider charges. Common financial issues are large bills for use of some services,

the telephone connection charges and telephone bills for calls made to friends in chat rooms. Other financial charges may include a connection with compulsive spending/shopping. Internet addicts may choose to shop online and credit card charges for purchases may become high. Also, a connection with gambling exists with the availability of online casinos.

WHAT MAKES THE INTERNET ADDICTIVE?

Some Internet users may develop an emotional attachment to online friends and activities they create on their computer screens. Internet users may enjoy aspects of the Internet that allow them to meet, socialize and exchange ideas through the use of chat rooms or “virtual communities.” These communities allow the person the means to escape from reality and seek out means to fulfill unmet emotional and psychological needs, which are more intimate and less threatening than real life relationships.

Some Internet addicts may also create online personas where they are able to alter their identities and pretend to be someone other than themselves. The highest risk for creation of a secret life are those who suffer from low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and fear of disapproval from others. Such negative self-concepts lead to clinical problems of depression and anxiety.

There is help for Internet addiction. A free, confidential assessment may be scheduled by calling Continuum EAP at 402.476.0186 / 800.755.7636 or emailing eeaspecialist@4continuum.com.

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