

Volume 6, Issue 3

Let's Talk

From your Employee Assistance Program

For Better Living STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE: DARTH VADER BREATH

Breathing exercises have long been recommended for temporary relief of stress. Here's one called Darth Vader Breath: Breathe deeply as though you are trying to fog up a mirror in the back of your throat. Exhale as though you are trying to fog up a mirror in front of you. As you breathe, keep your shoulders down and fill your stomach like a balloon. This gives off a sound much like the Star Wars' villain, Darth Vader. The sound helps in another way by giving you something to concentrate on. (*J. Sachs: Nature's Prozac*)

CAPITALIZING ON MISTAKES

You've heard that a pessimist will say a half-glass of water is half-empty while an optimist will say it's half full. In other words, it's all in how you look at things. The same goes for mistakes. You can tie yourself in knots over your last mistake — the deadline you missed, the project you botched — but the truth is, mistakes are one of the major ways we learn. We may believe others will think less of us because of our mistakes, but mistakes are natural, and everyone makes them — everyone. Trying to cover up a mistake is a sure way to invite stress while admitting a mistake is a time-proven stress buster. By admitting your mistake, most people will be relieved to see that you accept yourself and your shortcomings. (*A. Lazarus and C. Lazarus: The 60-Second Shrink. San Luis Obispo, Calif.: Impact Publishers, 1997.*)

FOR A DRUG-FREE HOME

Research shows that the home is the most likely place for a young person to use alcohol or other drugs. Here's what parents can do to deter use.

- Store alcoholic beverages in a locked place.
- Tell parents of your children's friends that you don't allow underage alcohol or other drug use in your home. Ask them if that's their position, too.
- Talk with other parents if your child is spending the night at a friend's house or if there's a party. Will the party be supervised by an adult? Do those invited know that alcohol or other drugs aren't allowed?
- Make it clear to your son or daughter that you won't tolerate alcohol or other drug use. Set consequences and enforce them if they do use.

The Anxiety/Memory Connection

Getting help for anxiety could lead to an improved memory.



People who are anxious have yet another reason to worry — and to get help for their condition.

Canadian researchers have found that too much cortisol, a hormone linked to anxiety, interferes with memory. Cortisol is secreted by the adrenal gland. Although everyone produces it, people who are anxious produce more of it. (Worry, tension and uneasiness are all traits associated with anxiety.) When researchers at Montreal's McGill University tested the short-term memories of older people, they found that people who scored poorest on the test had high levels of cortisol in their blood.

The solution: Get help for your anxiety! Exercising, eating right and practicing relaxation exercises like meditation are proven techniques to reduce anxiety. Therapy and medication are helpful for people with severe anxiety.

For more information on anxiety and its treatment, contact your employee assistance program.

Source: Harvard Health Letter, 23(10): 1-3.

More Tips For A Better Memory

Train your brain. Research suggests that exercising your brain helps. Reading, playing bridge, figuring complex math problems or any other mentally stimulating activity will most likely help your brain perform other functions, such as remembering the name of someone you've just met or where you placed your car keys.

Make lists. Put calendars, appointment books and to-do lists to work for you.

Eliminate distractions. The less distracted you are, the more likely you'll retain important information. This applies especially to older people.

Take a class. An area hospital or college may hold a workshop on memory.

Consider medical help. Poor memory may be a sign of something else, such as an undetected stroke or Alzheimer's disease. If poor memory is troubling you, consider talking to a professional about treatment options.

Managing Anger

Like love, grief and happiness, anger is a basic, human emotion. It serves an important survival function by communicating to ourselves and to others that something is wrong.

How we express anger is something we learn. As children, we may have learned from one or both parents that anger can be used to get attention or to get one's way. Or we may have learned that we should show the *good emotions* — love and happiness, for instance — and keep *bad emotions* like anger inside.

Because we learn how to express anger, we also can learn how to manage it. This is particularly important for anyone who handles anger inappropriately — by hurting others or themselves or by making poor decisions in fits of rage.

Instead of expressing your anger in either of these ways, try this four-step approach.

Admit it.

Explore it.

Express it.

Drop it.

The next time you feel angry, *admit* it to yourself. Don't deny feeling angry or try to cover it up.

Then, *explore* why you're angry — get to the source of the emotion. If it's something someone said to you, ask yourself why it made you angry. If it's something someone did — or didn't do — search for the reason you are angry.

Expressing your anger is the next step. If you believe you might express yourself in a hostile rage, find a way to calm yourself down — take a few deep breaths or go for a walk. When you feel you can discuss the issue without exploding, do so. If your anger begins to build while you're expressing yourself, calm yourself down again.

The final step may be the hardest, but it's the most important of all. Once you've let the object of your anger know how you feel, *drop* it. Whether the object of your anger changes or not, you've done all you could by expressing your anger in a healthy way.

Anger can range from mild annoyance over

Ways NOT to Handle Anger

a wait at the doctor's office, to red-faced rage over something another driver did on the freeway.

Using the four steps just described — admit it, explore it, express it and drop it — can help you to better manage anger. Researchers also have identified four ways in which we may respond to feelings of anger, each of which has serious drawbacks.

✗ Denying that you're angry, or not being able to identify that you're angry, is called **evasion**. But evading anger only increases stress and may lead to such stress-related illnesses as headaches and depression (some counselors believe depression is unexpressed anger turned inward).

✗ To know that you are angry but to still keep it inside is called **containment**. Yet boxing up anger only delays its expression. Eventually, anger may lead to stress or stress-related illness or an angry outburst or temper tantrum.

✗ **Displacement** occurs when you take your anger out on something other than the object of your anger. A wife who gives away her husband's golf clubs because of something he said or a co-worker who sabotages a work project because he's angry over working conditions are examples of displacement.

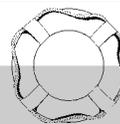
✗ **Indirect expression** occurs if you're angry for a specific reason, but blame your anger on something else. For instance, you may be angry with your teenaged son for his poor study habits, but instead of addressing his study skills as the source of your anger, you pick fights over his use of the phone.



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