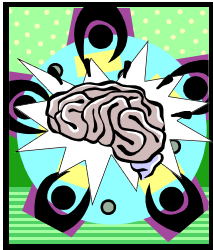


More Brilliant Brainstorming

Undoubtedly, you have heard of brainstorming—the problem-solving technique of generating as many radical ideas as possible among a group of participants quickly, in pursuit of the best solution. Participants play off each other’s ideas, and no censorship or critiquing of ideas occurs until the end. Brainstorming works, but despite its reputation for success, employees frequently fear disapproval for wacky, off-the-wall ideas. Brainstorming is therefore underused as a productivity tool. To make it more attractive, try:



- 1) Brainstorming without your boss. This may reduce inhibition in favor of creativity.
- 2) To stir creative juices, vote and award the weirdest idea at the end of brainstorming.
- 3) If ideas “dry up,” toss about random words to stimulate more ideas and keep the ball rolling.

Smoking Quit Line Launched!

Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson announced last month a series of initiatives designed to help Americans quit smoking. The initiatives include the opening of a national Quit Line number 1-800-784-8669 (1-800-QuitNow) that puts users in touch with programs that can help them give up tobacco. In addition, a new HHS Web site (www.smokefree.gov) offers live online advice during specific hours and tons of information to make cessation easier. HHS is now the first federal agency to be smoke-free (no smoking anywhere on HHS properties.)



Your Perception and Stress

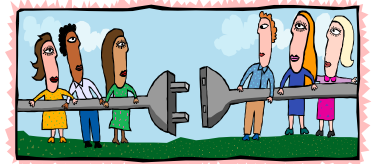


Research recently reported from the University of California, San Francisco showed that people with extremely stressful lifestyles and people with lifestyles not considered stressful each had more aged cells due to stress *only if they perceived their lives as stressful*. The reality, or objective measure of stress, was apparently not the key factor in cell aging. Researchers think your perception of stress may be the most determining factor in how it affects you. Don’t ignore or minimize events that cause stress. If it feels real, it is real. The EAP can help.

Source: Accelerated Telomere Shortening in Response to Life Stress; Department of Psychiatry; University of California; Elissa S. Epel.

Teams: Putting the Pieces Together

Like epoxy glue that requires two parts to make it bond, your team may struggle with high performance unless you nurture two important things: 1) communication and good relationships, and 2) skills and abilities. During the year, regularly participate in teambuilding that breaks down barriers and walls that inhibit social cohesiveness and cooperation. Also, take time to discuss and improve skills and abilities, strengths and limitations, and how well team members complement each other’s roles. Is your team what you want it to be? If not, it might be missing something in the glue that binds it.



When Kids Rule

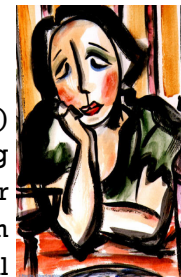
You may have heard in the news about the parents in Florida camping out on their front lawn, on strike and protesting their children's disrespect and lack of cooperation in an effort to force change. Some parents weren't laughing—they watched to see if it actually worked. A parent's attempt to develop a positive relationship with his or her child, monitor activities and whereabouts, and assist the teen in being independent, unfortunately, does not guarantee a smooth ride through adolescence. Most of the following behaviors, especially in combination, mean problems have reached crisis proportions. Does your teen exhibit any of them?



- 1) Threatening family members
- 2) Verbal/physical abuse toward family members
- 3) Staying out late without permission, gone for days, or running away
- 4) Associating with other troubled teens
- 5) Having secretive peers
- 6) Intoxicated or high when he or she comes home
- 7) Using the home as a "hotel"
- 8) Stealing from family members
- 9) Trouble with the law or employer
- 10) Isolation, avoidance of family activities, rage-like anger, and belligerence when he or she does not get his or her way
- 11) Suicidal statements or attempts

EAP can assess your relationship with your teenager, and help you explore options. Don't think it's hopeless even if you have taken your child for professional counseling that didn't work because he or she would not cooperate. There are other steps to take.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome



Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is characterized by puzzling symptoms of feeling "unwell" for six months or longer, having an increasingly lower tolerance for physical and/or mental activity, and experiencing negative impacts of this condition on work, social, and/or educational activities. Concurrently, four or more of the following symptoms exist: substantial impairment in short-term memory or concentration; sore throat; tender lymph nodes; muscle pain; multi-joint pain without swelling or redness; headaches of a new type, pattern or severity; un-refreshing sleep; and malaise lasting more than 24 hours after exertion. Ninety percent of people with CFS don't know they have it. Generally, ruling out other causes of feeling ill leads to the diagnosis. See your health care provider if you suffer from the above symptoms. Support groups exist in every state, and many people with CFS benefit from them. The EAP may be able to help you find one.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome of America

Insist on No Incivility

Uncivil behavior in the workplace is getting more research attention. It appears to have enormous cost. Examples of uncivil behavior include sending a nasty and demeaning note, making accusations about one's lack of competence, undermining a coworker's credibility in front of others, or shouting at coworkers. One study discovered that 28 percent of employees lost work time to avoid an instigator; 53 percent lost work time worrying about an incident or future interactions; 37 percent believed their commitment to the organization declined; 22 percent decreased their effort at work; 10 percent decreased attendance; 46 percent contemplated changing jobs to avoid the instigator; and 12 percent actually changed jobs to avoid the instigator. Uncivil behavior is often unreported because of a belief that no action will be taken, or that it might do more harm than good. Idea: If incivility is an issue for your work unit, would including it as an ongoing measure in performance reviews help reduce it?



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