

# THE FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE

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## Hee-Haw for Health

Lee Berk, Ph.D., of Loma Linda University, California, may be the foremost researcher on the benefits of laughter. His findings: laughter reduces stress hormones, increases antibodies that fight upper respiratory disease, increases tolerance to pain and increases heart rate. Humor is essential to mental health because it assists us in connecting with others, shifts the ways in which we think and replaces distressing emotions with pleasurable feelings. You cannot feel angry, depressed, anxious, guilty or resentful and experience humor at the same time. Humor changes how we behave, causes us to talk more and to make eye contact with others. In experiencing humor we touch others more, increase our energy, and, as a result, may perform activities that we might otherwise avoid.

*Source: Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor*

## Blaming the Parents

Although juvenile crime has dropped in recent years, states are beefing up parental liability laws. Starting around age eight, when kids can “make decisions” that damage property or hurt others, whether intentionally, recklessly or by malicious behavior, parents can be held financially liable. It’s called “vicarious liability” — being responsible for something you did not do because of your relationship with the person (or child) who did it. Laws vary widely, but the amount parents can pay has skyrocketed.

*U.S. Dept. of Justice, Juvenile Justice Bulletin, Oct. 2002*

## Salvaging Family Interventions

Group interventions conducted by families or friends to motivate an alcoholic or drug addict to enter treatment often work, but when they don’t, following these tips can improve the odds of eventual success: (1) Hold fast to tough decisions imposed on an addict as consequences for failure to accept help. Reversing these decisions will cause addictive disease to get worse. (2) Wait for the next incident or crisis, and in its wake, ask the addict to accept help. (3) If you separate from an alcoholic or drug-addicted relationship, do not badger the addict from afar to get help. Rekindling such a relationship will not motivate the addict to accept help. (4) Use a program like Al-Anon and follow its Twelve Steps. Then act decisively when the next drug- or alcohol-related incident occurs, making another offer to help the addict enter treatment.

## When Calm Makes You Crazy

Are you so busy in your job that you get stressed or anxious when blocks of time show up unfilled on your appointment calendar? Many people feel compelled to fill these free hours with more appointments and busy work to rid themselves of the anxiety. Don’t fall into this trap. If your job permits, use slow times to do things you have been putting off, such as organizing your desk or work area, planning for the future, learning new skills or preparing for upcoming projects.

## Coping with a Crisis

Life includes occasional crises. No one escapes them, but many avoid their worst effects on physical or mental health. A crisis is a major stressful event with the ability to significantly alter your life. Unfortunately, crises don't come with instruction manuals. But there are a few survival tips worth knowing about, and with them, you can improve your chances of adapting to the new circumstances crises bring.

**Open up.** Don't make a crisis a do-it-yourself experience. Reach out and communicate with others who can support you. Acknowledge the difficult impact. Share the emotional load to reduce the punch of a crisis. The EAP can be an ideal partner in helping manage a crisis.

**Manage feelings.** Crises can produce guilt, resentment, anger, fear and other powerful feelings you were unprepared to face. Avoid making a crisis worse by punishing yourself for what you feel. Share these feelings with those who care about you.

**Sort it out.** Discover what part of a crisis can be managed or changed. Work toward identifying and accepting that which cannot be changed.

**Take charge.** Feeling better and coping successfully with a crisis requires your participation. Without denying the importance of the crisis, decide that you will prevent your life from growing worse because of it.

**Take action.** Take steps that will improve the way you feel in the face of what a crisis brings. Small steps count. Act to make your life happier or better, knowing that by not coping with a crisis in this way, you risk going in the opposite direction and growing in unhappiness.

## High-Rise Evacuation OSHA Fact Sheet

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) has released its new safety fact sheet on evacuating high-rise buildings. High-rise buildings are those with floors higher than 75 feet. Tips: Know your worksite emergency plan and evacuation alarm. Know how many desks or cubicles are between your workstation and the two nearest exits in case you must leave in the dark. Know where alarms are located and know the signal for evacuation. Don't ignore alarms, thinking they are false or "only drills."

## Nixing Negativity

Peers can often exert a powerful influence on co-workers and help them turn around a negative attitude. Steps to take:

- (1) Avoid commiserating with employees who spew negativity. This is how it spreads.
  - (2) Remind an affected co-worker of the consequences of negativity, especially its effects on morale.
  - (3) Encourage a co-worker affected by negativity to use the EAP to become more proactive in the face of difficult work issues, or to better manage a negative attitude.
- Negativity is often *not* based on large unsolvable work problems. Instead, it is often a "life isn't fair" reaction to common workplace stresses not otherwise resolved by healthier means.

## Myth of Multi-tasking

Research on how well we do more than one thing at the same time, to get more done faster, shows it doesn't work. Not only can multi-tasking increase stress, it ultimately is less efficient. Evidence indicates memory can be affected from the prolonged presence of adrenaline, which disturbs memory cell production. Are you blanking out in mid-sentence or forgetting what you were going to say? You might be a "multi-tasker." When you multi-task (i.e., shift between computer programs, talk to people on the phone and eat a sandwich all at the same time), you lose time and efficiency this is because your brain is being asked to do three things: take time to switch between tasks, shift to the correct part of your brain needed for the present task and discard thinking pathways used in the previous task in favor of new thinking pathways needed for the new task.

*Source: Journal of Experimental Psychology; Vol. 27, No. 4.*