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- Free individual, marital or family counseling for employees and their dependents
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Communicating with New Technology

In a fast-paced workplace, personal communication is difficult enough. Add all the choices for communicating with technology, and it becomes faster but not often better. To reduce the likelihood of miscommunication and confusion, realize that the way you communicate over the Internet is different from face-to-face communication. You can't distinguish voice tones or body language through e-mail, so try rephrasing what was said in your reply, especially if it seems complex. This is called paraphrasing. Example: "Mary, you said you didn't make it to the meeting because you were 'sick and tired.' Were you physically ill, or were you disinterested in the subject of the meeting?" There are other protocols that can keep your communications smooth and prevent trouble with content and emotional e-mail. Find a bunch of great e-mail communication tips at: email.about.com/cs/netiquettetips

When Your Coworker Becomes Your Boss

If your coworker becomes your boss, you will likely wonder how things between you will change. Rule one: Talk about it. Discuss your friendship, communication, boundaries, and what will help your friendship remain intact. If you are feeling jealous and angry, sort out those feelings with another friend or the EAP. Former peer-coworkers can remain friends when one becomes the boss, but it requires awareness of new stressors on the relationship and a willingness to interact in ways that both separate and support new roles.

The Art of Listening

You will be long remembered if you can make habits of these power-listening skills: Listen for understanding, not agreement. Allow for differences in opinion and lock in on what others say. That helps you build trust and nip conflicts in the bud. Cleanse your mind of all clutter that prevents you from listening. Don't worry about what went wrong earlier or what you want to say next. Focus on absorbing what others say, not winning an argument. See yourself as a sponge soaking up knowledge, not a hammer trying to nail home your point. And don't rush to interrupt. Ask questions to listen and learn even more. The hardest part of listening is staying attentive, especially if you're eager to defend yourself amid a verbal attack. Keep quiet, stay focused, and wave off distractions.

What to Take When Fleeing a Hurricane

Every second counts when you must evacuate after a hurricane warning. Knowing what to take—and preparing an emergency kit now—gives you a head start. Gather your insurance policies, wills, and other legal documents in a secure, waterproof case that you can carry easily. Insert a contact list so that you can reach key people from the road. Also, store safely at least three gallons of water per person and nonperishable food to last for at least three days, water-purifying tablets or chlorine bleach, first aid equipment, flashlights, radios, batteries, sleeping bags, baby wipes, diapers, prepared/baby food, toiletries (soap, toothbrush, etc.), and prescription medications.

Set Goals to Spur Your Success

Your performance review is a perfect time to set new career-related goals. But instead of letting your manager impose goals for you to chase after, take the initiative and do it yourself. Prepare by identifying your most and least favorite parts of your job. Think of a goal that enables you to produce better organizational results while doing what you like most (example: you enjoy interacting with customers, so you commit to making 10 calls a week to survey their satisfaction level). Devise a plan to spend less time on what you dislike (example: you dread completing weekly activity reports, so you propose submitting a streamlined monthly report instead). Discuss what yardsticks you and your manager will use to track your progress. Make sure you can access accurate, quantifiable, transparent data so that there's no ambiguity in the march toward your goal. Clear, easy-to-track benchmarks might include daily number of files processed, amount of revenue generated, or volume of client inquiries that you handle. Align your goals with your employer's needs by asking your manager three questions:

1. *What would I need to do over the next six months to exceed your expectations and deliver exceptional performance?*
2. *In what areas would you like me to improve?*
3. *If I deliver consistently superior performance, how can that enhance my career here?*

For more help, try talking to the EAP in confidence. It could be your best sounding board for deciding upon that next turn in your career.

Secondhand Smoke Not Safe

What's a safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke? You may assume limited exposure does little harm. But a new Surgeon General report finds that any exposure poses a risk. Smokers inhale toxins when they puff on a cigarette, but evidence shows that breathing secondary smoke does even more damage. Nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke face a 20 to 30 percent increased risk of heart disease and lung cancer. The report, which many may find controversial, recommends banning smoking indoors, not segregating smokers and installing ventilation systems.

Source: www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/

Fight Off Heat Stress

Heat stress occurs when extremely hot temperatures pose bodily harm. Take steps to recognize its symptoms and reduce your risk. Signs include frequent headaches, dizziness, and leg, arm, or stomach cramps. Mental confusion can set in—and you may even feel chills. Allow time to recover from heat exhaustion. In many work-related heat-stroke deaths, employees lose consciousness on their way home. Prevent heat stress by drinking up to two gallons of cool water a day in extreme heat and high humidity, retreating into shade or cooler break rooms periodically, and wearing light-colored clothes and a wide brimmed hat when working in direct sunshine. You're more prone to heat stress if you take diet pills, sedatives, or tranquilizers. And both caffeine drinks and alcohol increase your vulnerability. Slow exposure to hot environments helps your body adjust. So beware when abruptly engaging in physical labor in 90+ degree heat or returning to a hot work site after weeks in a cooler climate.

Do Your Kids Get Enough Sleep?

Start setting your preteen's alarm earlier each day, beginning at least one week before the first day of school. Your goal: to condition them to wake up in time to arrive at school well rested. If they sleep as late as they want all summer—and then suddenly must awake much earlier on day one of school—their bodies may rebel. It's better to adjust their sleep cycles incrementally in the run-up to school. Some parents mistakenly set an earlier bedtime on the assumption that this change will enable their kids to wake up at the crack of dawn. A smarter strategy: Enforce an earlier wake-up time while letting children choose when to go to sleep. As long as you make them get up when the alarm sounds, they will head to bed earlier because they'll be too tired to stay up later. Hint: If your family is having difficulty getting organized and back into the "school groove", perhaps it's a sign that you need to talk to the EAP for quick tips, short-term support, and guidance.