

Stress away from the Office is on the Rise

by Jeff Davidson

04/22/2014



As the pace of society changes, HR professionals and the employees they recruit experience more stress.

Traditionally, you could count on "dad" or "mom" to bring their stress home from the office. Yet, the dominating direction has shifted—reports show that it's more stressful for most career professionals outside of work! Today, mom and dad, Ted and Alice, or other significant others are likely to bring more stress to work than they leave with at the end of the day.

These "away for work" stressors encompass marriage, health, and loneliness. Consider what has happened to employees away from work in the last two decades, and it's not hard to see why getting to work can be a relief. First, traffic is worse everywhere. If that's not bad enough, you could be on call at any moment. If your health isn't an issue for you, chances are the health of your children or your aging parents is.

Among the litany of problems and obstacles that marriage partners face today are personal finances, career and dual career concerns, too many responsibilities, raising their children, health, sex, etc. Pressed and frazzled by the onslaught of responsibilities, more couples are finding it exhausting to have to "be" with one another—to converse, to empathize, to be responsive.

No Friends?

Jacque Cook, an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Oklahoma's Health Sciences Center says, "Millions of couples have no friends, even though many wish they could have the same warmth and sharing they see on television." Many of us are too busy juggling family and career to make and keep friends, so we rely entirely on spouses to meet our need for companionship.

"This is not a good thing," Cook says. "When you put all your eggs into the marriage, other relationships suffer and

the marriage gets overtaxed. It's too much to ask one person to meet all your emotional and practical needs."

Cook suggests that couples who want to branch out and make friends take up tennis, golf, hiking, or join a civic or volunteer group.

All By Myself

Loneliness is making its way up the list of the top stressors. More people live alone in the U.S. than at any other time in history, and the trend is beginning to take hold in Europe and other parts of the industrialized world. The average number of occupants per dwelling is actually falling.

With the Internet offering individuals the opportunity to experience a sense of hyper connectivity, for many people, the most interaction they have throughout the day away from work—and in some cases even including work—is online.

Is it any surprise that television shows with themes such as that of "How I met Your Mother" become instant hits from their first airing? Do you personally receive any type of vicarious pleasure from visiting with your electronic "friends" every week? (You know, the NCIS or Bones crowd.)

Here are a few insights about loneliness and its potential relationship to stress:

- Single or divorced men, on average, live much shorter lives than married men.
- Many couples have no friends, even though many wish they could have the same warmth and sharing they see on television.
- Elderly single (widowed, divorced, or never married) men and women are more susceptible to sales and telephone scams. It is postulated that they desire to have a conversation with someone—anyone, be it a visiting solicitor or friendly voice on the phone.
- Dating sites everywhere are thriving.
- Among those leaving suicide notes, being jilted by a lover continues to be cited as among the most prevalent reason for taking one's life

In observing contemporary society, it would not be an exaggeration to say that loneliness is a stress-inducing epidemic (if unarticulated as such) affecting people from all walks of life. This, coupled with other stressors, such as concern for health, whether it is your own or a loved one's, make life away from work often as stressful as in the work place, if not more so.