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A Hard Day (Away) From the Office

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By Jeff Davidson

- What is a Competitive Advantage? And Who Needs One?

As the pace of society changes, individuals experience more stress. Traditionally, you could count on "Dad" to bring his 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 significant others are likely to bring more stress to work than they leave with at the end of the day.

- Leadership and Conflict Resolution

These "away from work" stressors encompass marriage, health, and loneliness. Consider what has happened to the average man and woman 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 carrying a Smartphone where you're on call at any moment. If your health isn't an issue for you, chances are it is the health of your children or your aging parents.

- A Hard Day (Away) From the Office

Among the litany of problems and obstacles that marriage partners face today are personal finances; career and dual-career concerns; too many responsibilities, including raising children; health; and intimacy — get it? All of these are the same things that make the top ten stressors list. Pressed and frazzled by the onslaught of responsibilities, more couples are finding it exhausting to have to "be" with one another — to converse, empathize, and be responsive. Not surprisingly, the number of families headed by a single adult—usually female—is growing, placing inordinate strains on working individuals with children. Spouses who both work have more income and spend more, but invariably are experiencing stress.

- Flexible Leadership for Uncertain Times

Words from the Wise

"Example is not the main thing in influencing others; it is the only thing."

- Albert Schweitzer

No Friends?

Jacque Cook, an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Oklahoma 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 ten stressors. Today, more people live alone in the U.S. than at any 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. For many people, television, online services, and the ability to connect with the world is the usual interaction they have throughout the day away from work—and in some cases, even including work—online chat room psychobabble offers the most interaction.

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

Is it any surprise that television shows with themes such as "Friends" 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 House 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 singles (widowed, divorced, or never married) are more susceptible to sales and telephone scams. It is known they desire to have a conversation with someone—anyone—whether a visiting solicitor or friendly voice on the phone.
- * On any given night, by about 9:30 eastern time, most, if not all, of the commercial on-line chat rooms are filled to capacity.
- * The "personals"—advertisements for companionship—in virtually every urban and suburban publication that carries them are a thriving feature of the respective publication. The ads themselves are placed by a diverse range of individuals representing all races, ages, lifestyles, occupations, and sexual orientation.
- * 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.

About the Author

Jeff Davidson, CMC, MBA, is The Work-Life Balance Expert®. A speaker at many large companies, Jeff believes that career professionals today in all industries have a responsibility to achieve their own sense of work-life balance. He supports this quest through his websites www.BreathingSpace.com and www.Work-LifeBalance.net. Jeff can be reached at jeff@breathingspace.com