

MENTORING MINUTES

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Newsletter

**RELATIONSHIP CORNER
WITH MARTIN PETERS****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:****RELATIONSHIP
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"Our relationship was great in the beginning. We use to do everything together - we were like best mates. Then the kids came along and five years down the track we were just fighting all the time" Jake 36 years.

Jake is typical of so many people who come to the EAP for relationship counselling. In fact about one third of all people who come to counselling sight relationship difficulties as their main presenting problem. This may come as no surprise given the divorce rate in Australia.

Many people cite issues relating to money, infidelity, children and communication as the big issues that threaten relationships. From my experience as a therapist the main thing that threatens relationships is complacency - doing nothing!

Unfortunately by the time many couples come to relationship counselling it can sometimes be too late and the damage has been done. However, if **both** parties are willing to co-operate in relationship counselling then it can be a very effective in healing the wounds and moving forward. Over the next few newsletters I would like to cover some of the key points to ensure a good and lasting relationship.

Today's key point in building a lasting relationship is **FEELING SAFE AT HOME.**

The reality is that we mostly show disrespect to people we are closest to. We often find that conflict is one critical element that brings couples to counselling. Those that show the ability for conflict resolution in an effective way generally have good marriages. Thus conflict resolution is a sound predictor of a healthy marriage in the future. One common problem of what can be termed "passive conflict" occurs where one person wants to talk about certain issues and the other withdraws. Some would say this is not the most serious problem, but one that I have found nonetheless will destroy the very fabric of marriage.

Of course we often hear the so frequently repeated phrase, "My husband won't talk", and yet a husband who says "My wife nags all the time". It's important to remember that women use communication to build relationships while men generally use communication to

make decisions. Having made the decision, communication for men ceases, while for women, once a decision has been made the communication actually starts! In fact, in order to get an opportunity to speak, its not unusual for women to stir up conflict just to enable some form (any form) of communication.

It's easy to understand how men come to believe that women like to criticise and women come to believe that men don't care. The facts are that women simply want to talk and men want less conflict. This is what I mean by being safe at home, simply the safety to speak your mind.

For more information about relationship counselling call your EAP on 1800261955.

**HEAS CONSULTANT
PSYCHOLOGISTS**

Level 2, 414 Hunter St,
PO Box 1148
Newcastle NSW 2300

Tel. (02) 4925-3333
Fax (02) 4925-3933

Website:
www.heas.com.au

Email:
heas01@ozemail.com.au



CONFUSED ABOUT COFFEE

It's hard to tell these days whether caffeine is good or bad for you. A recent study published in the US Journal of Circulation shows heavy, long term coffee drinking does not raise the risk of heart disease for most people. And another study in Japan last year suggests that 4-5 cups of coffee per day can half your chance of getting liver cancer. So is it really all that bad? The old adage everything in moderation is probably a good one for caffeine.

Caffeine is an **addictive drug**. Among its many actions, it operates using the same mechanisms that amphetamines and co-

caine use to stimulate the brain. On a spectrum, caffeine's effects are milder than amphetamines, cocaine and heroin, but it is manipulating the same channels, and that is one of the things that give caffeine its addictive qualities. If you feel like you cannot function without it and must consume it every day, then you are addicted to caffeine.

As with other drugs, people's sensitivity and reaction to caffeine is also greatly varied. People often do not realize how much caffeine they are consuming throughout the day. Aside from tea and

coffee, there are numerous energy and soft drinks that contain caffeine, as well as some foods.

One important thing to remember is that caffeine is not a good thing when you are stressed. In fact, it can often make it worse as it stimulates the adrenal glands to produce more adrenaline. **Adrenaline** is the "fight or flight" hormone and has a number of unpleasant effects on your body. If you suffer from stress, anxiety or panic attacks, avoid caffeine as much as possible to reduce your symptoms.

MANAGING CONFLICT AT WORK

Conflict at work can cause significant stress, concern and discomfort. Given the amount of time people spend at work today we can certainly do without ongoing conflict. Here are some hints and tips to assist you to resolve conflict at work.

Preparation and appropriate presentation of the issues are vital to resolving conflict constructively. Below are several factors to consider when dealing with conflict:

Preparation

- Commit to discussing the issue with the person with whom you have the conflict.
- Make appointments to resolve conflict—don't 'spring' it on people.
- Avoid gossip and rumors at work as they will make conflict worse.
- See conflict as an opportunity to share, exchange and understand different viewpoints and problem solve—enter into a conflict resolution discussion with this aim.
- Make sure you and the other party are in the right frame of mind to ensure you to have a constructive discussion of the issues—don't enter into discussions when either party is clearly stressed, emotional, tired or under time

pressures.

- Write down your issues concerns and identify the impact these are having on you, your situation and or the relationship with the other party (e.g. we both need this to work, we both want to feel comfortable here).
- Know what you want to achieve, what you are prepared to give, and what you want or need from the other party to come to a resolution.
- Prepare yourself for emotions and develop a plan to manage your own and assist the other party with theirs to allow for a constructive discussion.

Presentation

- Ensure that the wording, tone and manner of your approach is not destructive or accusatory and likely to put the other person on the defensive—this generally means:

Avoiding: put-downs, personal attacks, blaming, sarcasm, criticizing, moralizing, threatening, interrupting, trying to win at all costs.

Attempting: to be calm, clear, tactful, honest, balanced (owning your role, part of impact on the issue/relationship).

- Allow the other party a 'right of reply' and ensure you listen fully and attentively to the other party's point of view. This means attentive body language, acknowledging points, clarifying through paraphrasing or questioning.
- Respond constructively—don't react—think about your response and do not match a criticism or difference of opinion with a counter-attack
- Make it clear what your next step will be (we'll try this for a month and if it does not work I will come back to you to discuss it further).
- Identify who you need to speak to next should the conflict remain unresolved (supervisor, human resources).

To resolve the different types of conflict we may encounter, we need to be able to be flexible in our approach and where possible be prepared to attempt to collaborate. It may, however, also be appropriate at times to take immediate corrective action, compromise, or accommodate over an issue, as long as these are not used as a substitute for attempts at joint problem solving.