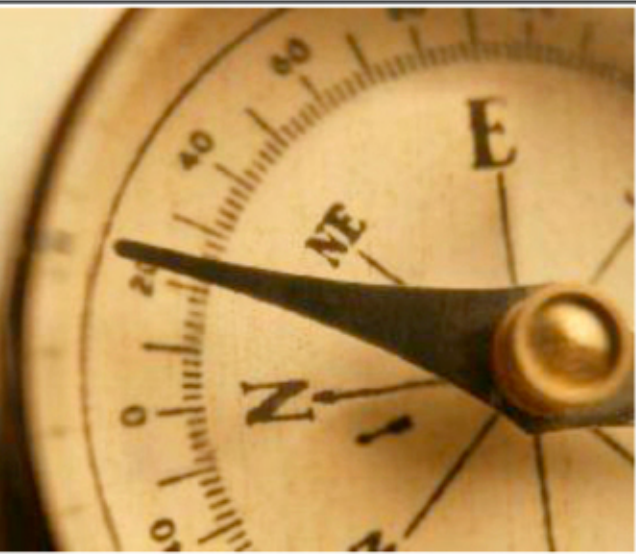


LifeMapSM



"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."

November 4, 2008

This Week's Message:

**Coping With Family
Stress.**

Paths Forward

**Tired of boring
meetings??**

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Coping With Family Stress.

In my consulting practice two issues come up on a regular basis: managing stress at work and trying to achieve a work life / non-work life balance. These seem to be "acceptable"

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topics for conversation with the company shrink. It is fairly common to hear folks talk about how stress at work affects their home life. But recently more than a few folks have shared with me that the level of stress they experience at home is affecting their work life.

Though we may try to compartmentalize our lives, it makes perfect sense that what happens in one area of our lives affects what happens in others. And, if what I'm seeing is a trend, home life seems to be becoming more stressful than ever before. Some have shared with me that they feel guilty or personally incompetent about this because it means that they have somehow failed to create a peaceful and nourishing household. I sure wish that each of our households were like islands of tranquility and relaxation in a sea of stress. But I'm not sure how realistic that desire is in our hectic world of conflicting demands from work, children, school, civic and church involvement, financial obligations, elder needs, chores, household maintenance and so on. And it is only natural that this overload of concerns generates stress.

Outside of certain "feel good" movies or unrealistic TV shows a certain level of family stress is predictable. The pace of modern life has been accelerated by technology that was originally introduced as our friend. Has the laptop, beeper, the PDA, the cell phone, FedEx, email, and the Internet really helped us manage our lives more efficiently thus making more time available for an enjoyable life? Or have these wonderful tools made us easier targets for the demands that come constantly from all directions. I use and enjoy these tools though I eye them warily for their propensity to creep into every corner of my life.

We can't blame technology completely for today's speed of life. We are responsible for creating the climate in our household. Is your household one where everything happens at the last minute, where all events have a sense of urgency, where meals are gulped on the run, where the "Mom & Dad Taxi Service" is in constant motion? If so, it is no wonder that there is so little time to relax.

Why worry about household stress if, after all, it is only a reflection of modern life?

1. It is bad for your children because they are more sensitive to it than adults. It has been shown that stress can harm a baby even before it is born. A 44-year study in Finland showed that emotionally turbulent families and

stressful life events have been linked as risk factors for schizophrenia. And by modeling a stressful lifestyle to your youngsters you are teaching them to live that way themselves.

2. It is bad for you. Loss of sleep, change in appetite, increase in blood pressure, coronary heart disease, some ulcers, anxiety and sometimes mental illness can result from living under constant distress. It almost goes without saying that stress has a negative impact on your intimate relationships.

3. It diminishes the overall quality of family life, which includes some of the most satisfying aspects of life such as communicating with, enjoying the company of and supporting those whom you care most about in this world.

Recognizing family stress and coming up with practical coping mechanisms to bring it under some control is more important than worrying about it. No one technique fits every family. Try a few of the suggestions that follow and see how they work for you. Then try a few more. Develop a diverse menu of stress reducing techniques and then post them somewhere where everybody can easily refer to them.

Paths Forward

- **Adjust Your Priorities.** Some things are more important than others. Tackle the "must do" activities first. Never agree to do something ASAP (as soon as possible); assign a value to the task and address it in its proper sequence. Let go of compulsions to be perfect, to get it all done or never leave anything hanging. There is no such thing as perfect, you'll never get it all done and there is always some on-going project in the works. Get used to it.
- **Super-Parent Is A Myth.** Your parents weren't perfect and somehow you survived. We all want to do the best we can for our children but burning ourselves out in the process sets a poor example for them. Choose your children's time and activity commitments carefully. Many children today are way over-scheduled and racing from one activity to the next sport or lesson may be doing them more harm than good. Add a second or third child and a parent may barely have time enough left over to get food on the table. This is stressful for the parent and stressful for the child.
- **Say No.** If it's not important, say "No". Volunteer work is great but if it doesn't further a goal that is important to you (e.g. networking into a new field, involving yourself in your

child's school) say no until your other commitments decrease. Extended family and friends can be a great help but they can also be a time vacuum. When you have to say no to those close to you explain why and those who love you will understand and support you.

• **You Didn't Invent Family Stress.** Build up a support network. Cultivate the friendship of parents who have already gone through this and have ideas and tips to share with you. Identify a roster of folks who can give you solid advice on specific topics like home repair, frugal shopping, schoolwork, pets, household finance, dealing with elders, and the like. Share difficult tasks with friends or trade time helping each other with chores or emergencies.

• **Self-Care is Family Care.** There will be times of exhaustion, frustration, aggravation and, yes, stress in your family life. But unless something is actually on fire or someone is actually bleeding there is always a minute or two at hand for you to do some deep breathing and relax a bit. Counting backwards from 100 can lower your blood pressure in just the time it takes. With a bit more time tap your own list of helpful stress reduction techniques such as making lists, setting limits, preparing tonight for tomorrow, limiting time on the phone and Internet. You cannot care for others if *you* are in significant distress. Thus, taking care of yourself is in the best interests of your family. And it helps other family members learn how to live more healthy and enjoyable lives as well.

Life Map is about addressing the multiple demands of modern life with calmness, optimism and practical, life-affirming choices.

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