Shining Light On The Darkness

By Joseph Hammann LPCC, Editor – EmployeeCare News

Americans are gaining weight, the teen suicide rate is on the rise and homebuyers and lenders are doing business in more careless and greedy ways. Why?

I believe the American public is escaping negative feelings by eating, drinking or buying their way to happiness. Teen-agers see adults unsuccessfully burying their depression in material things. They lose hope in battles with their own demons often turning to drugs, food, computer compulsion or even death when these remedies merely create more emptiness.

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EmployeeCare counselors and other caregivers are acquainted with depression. It takes courage to revisit past hurts and mistakes. Burying them only dulls the spirit. EmployeeCare counselors help wrestle with the dread to recognize the agony in our lives so we are able to overcome it.

Everyone feels the dark forces in life. We all know them: despair, anxiety, guilt, shame, depression, rage, hopelessness, rejection, meaninglessness, loneliness, inadequacy and grief. All of us have come face to face with these feelings.

We need to find new ways to respond. There are other responses to darkness than burying oneself in work, food or consumption to fill up or avoid the big holes inside. If you know someone suffering, tell him or her about EmployeeCare. When the chemistry at EmployeeCare mixes with another’s, it can grow enthusiasm and hope. Give us a call so you can invest your waking hours in action to turn your darkness into the light of peace and accomplishment.

American values have instilled in us the notion to go it alone. Ben Franklin advised people to “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.” The rugged individualism of the pioneer is heroic in our culture. Ben Franklin and the pioneers, however, were often fighting to survive the elements. Living another day against the odds of nature gave their lives meaning.

Today, going it alone and keeping our feelings to ourselves could kill us – some more slowly or faster than others. We need to shine light on our darkness so the feelings of loss, loneliness, fear and shame surface. The person we choose to share our dark forces has undoubtedly experienced the same emotions.

As the poet, Robert Frost, said in “Acquainted with the Night”

I have been acquainted with the night.

I have walked out in rain – and back in rain.

I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.

I have passed the watchman on his beat.

And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet

When far away an interrupted cry

Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-by;

And, further still at an unearthly height

One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.

I have been one acquainted with the night.

On the flip side, American values also tell us that two heads are better than one. Asking another to listen as we try pulling ourselves from the darkness can help the healing. Sharing our pain and confusion with another person can bring us light and renewed hope. We will not feel as badly about our failures if we risk trusting our darkness to someone else.

Remember how the leaves, fruit and flowers are reborn every spring from the dead of winter. Our potential to grow new life is just as real since we are a part of nature’s cycle too.
Several weeks ago, I was asked to submit an article for this newsletter. I wanted to write something I felt would be valuable to the majority of readers. Unfortunately, nothing came to mind that I believed would be helpful to my identified audience. So, I put off writing the article. I knew that eventually I would get to it; besides there were other pressing items that continued to creep up such as, unforeseen work emergencies, family illnesses, my son’s band camp and . . . fatigue. The list was endless and so were my excuses for postponing this article.

The deadline is rapidly approaching and I’m clueless. I panicked. My anxiety level has increased; my stress level is at an all time high.

I happened to speak with a friend in Indianapolis about my dilemma, who told me I was procrastinating. Do you recall such phrases, “if it wasn’t for the last minute, a lot of things wouldn’t get done.” “Putting off an easy task makes it hard. Putting off a hard task makes it impossible.” “I’ll wait and it’ll get better.” “I’ll put this off until I feel better tomorrow.”

Let’s look more closely at procrastination. Most of us have a tendency to put off something eventually doing our task without much anxiety or worry. It is quite normal. However, when we feel paralyzed, how do we get a jump-start? Do you find yourself postponing necessary tasks? Do you say, “I’ll get to it eventually.” Putting things off can result in stress, lost productivity, guilt, and sometimes a lack of trust by others.

If you accept your occasional procrastination and do not like the stress, anxiety and guilt that accompanies it, look at some strategies to combat it. In his book, Your Erroneous Zones, Dr. Wayne Dyer states:

- Make a decision to live five minutes at a time. Instead of thinking in long-range terms, think about now and try to use up five-minute periods doing what you want, refusing to put off anything that would bring about dissatisfaction.
- Ask yourself, “What is the worst thing that could happen to me if I did what I am putting off right now?”
- Give yourself a designated time slot which you will devote exclusively to the task you have been delaying. You will see that 15 minutes of devoted effort are often sufficient to see you over the hump of procrastination.
- Be courageous about undertaking an activity you have been avoiding. One act of courage can eliminate all that fear. Stop telling yourself that you must perform well. Remind yourself that doing is far more important than having to be perfect.
- Set realistic goals; dwell on success and not failure. A project is easier when built in stages.

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• Change your perfectionist way of thinking. “I must pick the right colors for my bathroom.” “I should be a perfect parent.” Often, we procrastinate because we want to be perfect. We fear failure. This can lead us to trying nothing.

• Finally, you need to “Think Nike” and Just Do It! Quit smoking . . . now! Begin your diet . . . this moment . . . Give up drugs this second . . . stop reading this article, put it down, and begin your exercise program . . . walk around the building . . . do a push up . . . that’s how you combat procrastination with action now!

Scheduling an appointment with EmployeeCare can make you more productive. Calling can lead to creating a list of healthy things to do. Putting that list in a visible place keeps the tasks at the front of our minds. Give us a call at 208-6626 or (800) 628-9343.

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EmployeeCare

Located: 409 E. Monument St.
   Suite 201
   Dayton, Ohio 45402

We have satellite offices in Eaton, Springboro, Troy, Greenville and on the Good Samaritan Hospital campus

Hours: 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
   Monday – Thursday
   8 a.m. – 6 p.m. Friday

All counselors provide evening appointment times

Phone: (937) 208-6626 or (800) 628-9343
   (24-hour, toll free)

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