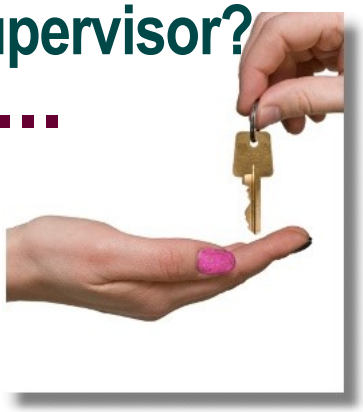
PATHWAYS
October 2019
The **Employee** Newsletter of the BOCES Employee Assistance Program

Give Your Brain a Break

Be more productive at work by taking breaks. Here's your motivation if you are inclined to skip them: a neurologic discovery called "voluntary" and "involuntary" attention. Each type of attention engages different uses of your brain. When you focus on work, whether it is a computer or a car engine, you are purposeful, intense, and focused; this is voluntary attention. In contrast, involuntary attention occurs when you walk down a sidewalk; you are not focused, but you are "attending" to the environment as it appears—butterflies, clouds, traffic, trees, flowers, wind, sunshine, sounds, and sensations. This process of allowing your brain to engage the world in a way (being "pulled" along rather than "pushed") that relieves your stress and refreshes you neurologically. The payoff is improved memory and attention back at work.

Learn more: Google "how nature soothes involuntarily."

Promoted to Supervisor? Do This Next…

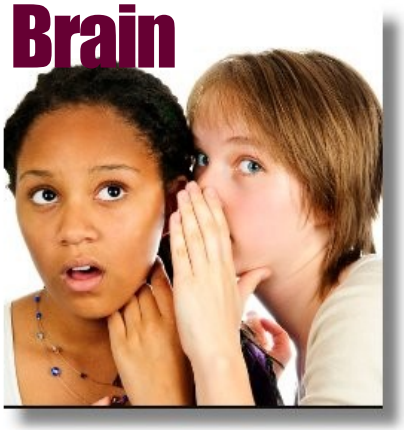


If you are a new supervisor, learning the following skills will greatly enhance your leadership: 1) observing performance; 2) documenting properly; 3) correcting performance; 4) evaluating fairly; 5) giving feedback; 6) praising and inspiring employees; 7) delegating effectively; 8) resolving conflicts; 9) team building; and 10) communicating effectively with upper management. Put "how-to" information in an easy-access binder. There are other skills to learn, like helping prevent violence or investigating complaints, but these ten are the building blocks for nearly all others.

World's Most Enabling Statement

Drop the use of the term "functional alcoholic." Often used to describe an alcoholic whose drinking practices do not appear to cause life problems, this is perhaps the world's most enabling utterance. Alcoholism, like cancer, tends to be a chronic health problem and likely leads to death if left untreated. You may observe that family members who are the most affected by alcoholism virtually never use this phrase. In practical terms, functional alcoholism means "the alcoholic's drinking doesn't bother me." Unfortunately, this phrase fuels denial, offering an excuse to avoid interventions that might otherwise save a life.

Marijuana and the Developing Brain



You need reliable information if you are a parent or guardian seeking to help children understand the dangers of marijuana. Help them to decide to stay away from it. You can view refreshed information at the drugabuse.gov web site. Its information is well scrutinized, so you can rely on it. New information there includes street forms of THC and street terms used for concentrated THC oils, research summaries on the impact of marijuana on the adolescent brain, and more. Example: Did you know that 9% to 30% of marijuana users will develop a form of substance use disorder? Source: DrugAbuse.gov.

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Is Your Patience Running Thin?

Patience is a learned skill, but unlearning patience can happen in our quick-to-deliver technological world. A study from the United Kingdom found that most people demonstrate a short fuse at 25 seconds for a red light, 16 seconds for a web page to load, and 28 seconds for a cup of tea to boil. Recapturing your sense of patience starts with awareness of how impatience increases stress and how undesirable it is to experience anger. Don't get mad at technology or lose yourself to a fast-paced, hurry-up society. Instead, practice patience by challenging yourself when the opportunity appears. From red traffic lights to checkout lines, you will have plenty of opportunities to react as usual or rebel. Choose the slower line at a drive-in, the longer line at the checkout counter, or learn how to use waiting time to complete a to-do list or another cerebral task. While waiting, notice the world around you and enjoy escaping the pressure as you take back control over the push to be impatient. Celebrate taking charge, getting your life back, and having more resilience to withstand everyday life events we all find stressful. If pressure builds, breathe in slowly, hold it a few seconds, and exhale slowly to reinforce a relaxed feeling.

Improve Communication with Your Boss

A top stressor for many employees is relationship conflict with the boss. But delve deeper and what often appears is irregular or unclear communication. A quiet supervisor one day or an abrupt short answer to a question the next might leave you distracted and wondering about the status of your relationship. "Is everything all right with my work?" "Is the boss upset with me?" "What's on his (her) mind?" Avoid these stressful guessing games. Starting now in your relationship, get clarity with three "traditions:" ask your boss how he or she likes to communicate and how much; ask about the perceived acceptability of your work periodically; and be personable (i.e., "How was your weekend?"). Small civil exchanges make it easier to engage and increase the likelihood you'll team up earlier, more often, and more effectively when the going gets tough.

Organizational Change and Older Workers

If you have a work history where change came slowly, today's organizational change can be a shocker. It is often sudden and disruptive. If you're feeling overwhelmed, stay positive. Avoid cynicism. Let your employer know what will help you be more productive and contribute more. Avoid isolation, remain engaged, and keep a close circle of workers you can turn to for clarification on change and its impact on your work unit. If you're thinking, "Wow, I have never seen things this bad," turn to the EAP for support to process fears of uncertainty and loss. Allow the EAP to talk you through your next move, life step, finding more meaning in your current job, examining opportunities, and making the best of where you are right now. Such conversations fall under EAP confidentiality.

Are You Addicted to Your Smartphone?

Smartphone addiction is not a recognized mental disorder, but it gets a lot of attention in the news. One in three people can't get through a meal without looking at their phones, according to one study. Signs of problematic phone use may include feeling anxious without your phone, constantly checking your phone without a reason, reaching for your phone when bored, losing track of time while using your phone, being distracted while with friends or watching TV because you are on your phone, and texting while driving—especially after attempts to stop the practice following a near accident or close call. Compulsive behaviors are actions people engage in repeatedly even though they wish they could stop. Smartphone addiction can be one of them. Don't stay frustrated, feeling out of control. Talk with a counselor or your EAP.

Eastern Suffolk BOCES

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