

Next Chapter Notes

A Newsletter for those in
pre-retirement or retirement

Feeling Singled Out at Work or, Oddly, with Your Friends or Family?



A common complaint among employees is feeling singled out at work—more scrutiny, negative feedback, more work, and higher expectations than asked of peers, friends or family. This experience is stressful and can leave you uncertain about your future. The good news is there are constructive ways to navigate it, leading to a better relationship with others. Experience shows these steps work best: 1) Give yourself permission to consider whether any feedback, however uncomfortable, might be useful. This can be difficult because when you feel attacked, the tendency is to defend yourself rather than consider the other person's point. 2) Request a calm, private one-on-one to clarify issues and expectations. 3) Talk to someone you can trust who can offer an honest outside opinion. 4) Consider speaking with a therapist or coach. They can help you sort through issues, stay objective, and prepare you for a productive conversation.

Stress Tips from the Field: Intervene Early in the Stress Spiral



Most people do not get help with stress or burnout right away. It's human nature to assume it is part of the job or that the stress you're experiencing will pass soon. But it's important to have awareness of the ability of your body and mind to adapt. Adapting to stress can be a slippery slope because the process is to normalize irritability, fatigue, poor concentration, sleep problems, or emotional exhaustion (which means denying its severity). This is called the "stress spiral." Intervene with this syndrome early. You want to reverse the pattern before it affects your health, relationships, and job performance. Get early help. There are many resources available that can help you with stress management, building your resilience, and help you thrive. Effective early help is easier to apply and works faster!

Learn more: apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/workplace-burnout

Recognizing Alcohol Creep

Do you unwind in the evening with a drink after work? Has it become a nightly pattern you increasingly look forward to? If you notice needing more alcohol than before to achieve the same relaxing effect, it may be an early sign of growing alcohol use disorder (AUD)/alcoholism/addictive disease. This "alcohol creep" can begin years before a diagnosis and may reflect nervous system adaptation to alcohol. AUD is widely understood to involve biologic processes or genetics as primary influences in progression of the illness, and stress or personal problems are often blamed for increased drinking. Be especially mindful if alcohol-related problems run in your family, and seek clarity about your drinking through your PCP or mental health practitioner. Doing so will help you better understand AUD, interrupt growing dependency, and reduce denial that later makes treatment more difficult.

Learn more: asam.org/quality-care/definition-of-addiction



Ghosting

Ghosting means ending contact without explanation, especially when future communication was expected. Although often linked to dating, ghosting happens in many social circles. Family, friends and employees may ghost others through social media, emails, or even difficult conversations. Have you been a ghoster or the ghostee? Research suggests that 75% of people have ghosted or been ghosted. The person ghosted often experiences confusion, self-doubt, and anguish. Many view ghosting as psychological mistreatment. People remember who follows through and who disappears. Consequently, ghosting can damage relationships, reputations and opportunities. If you ghost others, it may cause others to see you as unreliable. Fear, immaturity, low empathy, poor communication skills, conflict avoidance, and a culture with less social accountability may also contribute. If disappearing feels easier than facing an unpleasant interaction, consider talking with a trusted family member or colleague might help.



Learn more: routledgeopenresearch.org/articles/2-3

Perfect Friend Syndrome: The AI Relationship Trap

Don't be tempted to form artificial relationships with artificial intelligence (AI) that substitute for real human connection. Although engaging with AI online may feel satisfying because it can appear to offer empathy and patience, AI does not know you as a real person. Research shows what experts long theorized: These digital relationships cause psychological harm. The risk of connecting to AI as a substitute for a real person is losing social skills or not developing a deeper sense of interpersonal need and vulnerability that we all need. And loneliness can worsen. This is called "parasocial attachment to AI." This behavior is a one-sided emotional bond in which a person feels closeness, trust, and connection to an AI. However, AI cannot genuinely reciprocate or even recognize the relationship. AI's responsiveness can create the illusion of a mutual relationship, making the attachment feel real. This "perfect friend syndrome" doesn't push back. It doesn't experience bad days. It never demands something from you. This "no friction" experience is the problem, as real experiences are what make us human. AI can simulate conversation, but it will never offer warmth, share life history, or invest in you as a person. This is what makes human connection so special and irreplaceable. Is finding a meaningful relationship a goal in your life? Talk to the "live" mental health professional to discover how to build real human connections that matter most.



unesco.org/en/articles/ghost-chatbot-perils-parasocial-attachment

Communication Habits that Backfire

Communication habits cause many problems at work. The following are infamous for creating conflict and regret and contributing to a less-than-positive relationships. Do you recognize them? 1) Responding to an email or text when you're angry. Typing that pithy reply feels like a release when you are doing it, but experience shows it's better to draft it, save it, and then sleep on it. 2) Copying someone else, like your boss's boss on an email to expose your supervisor or make a point. Trying to gain leverage through a next-level manager often backfires. Most see it as manipulation or an attempt to undermine the relationship, and your reputation can suffer regardless of the concern. 3) Going silent when you can't make a promised deadline. When a deadline or expectations slip, don't make people wonder—give a heads-up early rather than making them wonder what's going on. 4) Being more selective with the phrase "That's not my responsibility." Remember: Even if it isn't your responsibility, people may remember your response long after the task is forgotten.



Learn more: dalecarnegie.com/blog/eight-tips-for-effective-communication-in-the-workplace

Men's Health Month: Unhealthy Habits that Hurt Men Later

Guys, your body won't let you forget unhealthy habits formed in younger years. Later in life, men often regret earlier health choices. 1) Don't ignore routine medical check-ups. Thinking "no symptoms, no problems" can shorten your life. Many conditions—including high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, coronary artery disease, and liver disease—have few early signs. These can damage your body for years even while you're feeling fine. 2) Don't ignore sleep issues or chronically sacrifice sleep. It can lead to weight gain, memory problems, faster aging, and heart issues. 3) Build habits for managing stress now. Denying or internalizing stress creates irritability, fatigue, anxiety, unhealthy coping, and relationship strain. 4) Don't ignore exercise. It helps fight disease, depression, and declining energy, but it gets harder to start over time. 5) Watch poor eating habits. Convenience foods and large portions add up and contribute to long-term health problems and reduced health span.



Learn more: [medlineplus.gov \[search "Screening Tests for Men Quiz"\]](https://medlineplus.gov/search/Screening+Tests+for+Men+Quiz)

Building a Positive Reputation

Being unflappable, competent, and nearly unerring can take you far, but the real leverage is a strong reputation built through how you interact with and treat others. The most powerful ways to achieve a good reputation are being reliable, communicative, and consistent. These qualities have everything to do with how others experience you. They cost nothing to achieve, but they shape whether you are perceived as trustworthy and valuable. Being reliable means following through consistently. Being communicative means that you share information clearly. And being consistent means you show high-quality performance over time. Here's the leverage: When people can count on you to follow through, communicate clearly, and show up consistently, you're trusted and recognized—so when opportunities arise, your name is more likely to be considered first. These habits help your family, friends and colleagues, but their power comes from how they influence conversations about you.



Learn more: blog.talentech.com/en/10-qualities-of-good-employees

