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EC63-1006 Put Health Knowledge into Practice

Helen Becker

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ROAD TO GOOD HEALTH!

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MANAGEMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH

By Helen Becker
Extension Specialist in Health Education

Good health affects and is affected by every part of our daily living. How we plan our work and leisure, how we react to strains throughout the day, what we eat, everything that happens to us and others about us determines our health and our success in managing our lives. Here are five secrets of living under strain that may help.¹

Know That Strain Is Normal

Everyday contacts and experiences are irritating at times. Johnny's search for his misplaced school books, Mary's desire to wear the pink blouse which is still unironed, your own failure to remember to buy that can of cinnamon when you were in the grocery store -- these are daily experiences that can be better understood if accepted as normal.

Talking about children, James Gillsey, in his book "When Life Gets Hard," tells of one father who had to take care of his

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children while mother was shopping. The father was a statistician by profession and this may explain the results:

Tied children's shoes 14 times.
Dried tears 16 times.
Served 22 drinks of water.
Arbitrated 26 fights.
Told children not to cross street 34 times.
Children crossed the street 34 times.
Toy balloons inflated--4 per child.
Average life of balloon--6 seconds.

This is real life--constant strain, year in, year out.

Plan With Purpose

The second secret of living under strain is that we must learn to say "yes" and "no" with a clear sense of direction and purpose so that we do not get on our horses and ride off in all directions at once.

When we "over-schedule" and "under-plan" our own lives, we make excessive demands upon others as well as on ourselves. As a result, everyone concerned suffers added strain.

Make Clear-Cut Decisions

We have now decided that strain is normal and that we must assume certain responsibilities and reject others. What is the third secret? Make clear-cut decisions--then follow through. It is indecision, the doubts and fears of whether we've decided right or wrong, that saps our energy and increases strain. It is double-mindedness and muddle-headedness that produces the instability associated with weak character.

Use Resources

Find and make use of all resources within ourselves and in our associations with others. We cannot stand alone or still if we are to discover and use the resources we need. The course of maturity is from dependence, through independence, to interdependence. Too often we make the mistake of stopping with independence and placing our reliance on "rugged individualism," as if to say that the person who can "stand on his own two feet" has outgrown his need for others.

True, as adults we are no longer dependent upon our parents for the necessities and decisions of life. We have achieved independence of making decisions and determining our actions. But the impact of



our decisions and actions upon the lives of others and of theirs upon ours is clear as we mature. We become increasingly aware of our interdependence and of the need to draw resources from others, and to give of our resources to them.

Don't Try To Be Perfect

What is the fifth secret of living with strain? It is to resist the compulsion to be perfect which often spills over into trying to force others to our own standards of perfection.

We need a little of this philosophy: When we have done all in our power to live with our strain, and when we have made noble efforts to keep our lives balanced, we still may not be as successful at it as we would like.

Resignation should not, of course, mean giving up--instead it is the recognition of the things we cannot or should not change.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr put it very aptly when he wrote: "God give us serenity to accept the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should and can be changed, and wisdom to know the difference."

MANAGEMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH ARE RELATED

Let us look at some of the ways in which management and mental health are related:

Do you know Sue (Mrs. Does Everything)? She is president of this, that, and the other and project chairman for the "aid-all-worthy-causes" federation. She is also mother of three pre-schoolers. Last week, Sue told her doctor, "when Jennie spilled her glass of milk, I screamed."

Do you know Katie (Mrs. Can't Get Going)? She is hostess for the "I-can't-get-going Koffee Klatch" which meets regularly whether or not other members come.

Do you know Judy (Mrs. Always Late)? She is never on time.

Do you know Sally (Mrs. Does Too Much)? She is a teacher in Ourtown and does a bang-up job. You can always count on Sally. She's the mainstay of dozens of worthy community organizations and takes courses at Our State U for personal stimulation. She and John entertain frequently, too. Last week, Sally told her guests, "I can't seem to do everything I'd like to do."

These women are not candidates for the mental hospital. It is likely, however, that better understanding of mental health and management can help each of them. ^{2/}

Goals

Goals are important ingredients of both good mental health and good management.

Mental health specialists emphasize the importance of having



^{2/} Ethyl R. Grady, Associate Research Professor of Home Economics, College of Home Economics and the Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Rhode Island. "Journal of Home Economics," April 1962.

something to live for, of setting goals which guide the direction of day-by-day living and which influence many of our decisions.

Resources

Resources are emphasized also by both management and mental health experts. Special importance is placed on realism or honesty with ourselves to recognize our abilities as well as our limitations. Some of our resources are:

Time - This is the only resource which is fixed - 24 hours per person per day. Planning the use of our time is important. Order in the home, peace and organization of the mind, is accomplished through planning, but there should always be an attitude of acceptance for interruptions or emergencies. One can almost hear Sally (Mrs. Does Too Much) say, "Look at those smudges on the window. Johnnie came home from school all excited about his science exhibit. He and I just had to celebrate his enthusiasm and I didn't get the windows cleaned as I planned." Who can say that this interruption was not more important than the window washing.

A day's plan may be merely a list of things to be done, or it may include a specific time table. A workable plan includes time for the job and for relaxation, time for your most strenuous tasks or activity and then some time to think. Mental health is balance. Management is a method to help achieve this balance.

Controlling the plan gives one the right to change as conditions change. Sally controlled her plan when Johnnie had news to share. An occasional change of mind or acceptance of lowered standards need not make one feel she has failed or is getting nowhere. Indeed, it is a much better mental health practice to know when it is appropriate to change standards.

We do need to check-up now and then just to judge or, as management experts say, evaluate our performance.

Energy - The physically healthy person should use her energy in achieving her goals.

When energy is not used, it may be wasted in nervous tensions or accumulated in the form of fat which is hard to get rid of. Experts tell us that using energy is often the best way to get more energy. They say that most people do not work to the limits of their energy resources, but they assume they are tired. This is actually boredom or psychological fatigue. Bored people often complain of fatigue. Some people become frustrated with tasks that they have to do every day. They see these tasks as endless -- and sometimes thankless as well.

Katie (Mrs. Can't Get Going) might have found it helpful just to accept routine for what it is. Why should we waste emotional energy disliking what must be done?

There are some people who really are limited in energy. Facing these limitations frankly is important. For some, increased knowledge and ingenuity can lead to energy-saving methods of work. Work simplification principles applies to the individual's needs and limitations have made it possible for even severely handicapped persons to assume many responsibilities.



Satisfactions

Mental health scientists tell us that most of our days should be "all right," -- this means balance. Some may term this neither "down in the dumps nor up in the clouds." Annoyances, failures, fears may be expected in life; but the healthy person takes them in stride. Sue (Mrs. Does Everything) was rightly concerned when her reaction to spilled milk was out of proportion to the annoyance.

Habits can help you perform routine tasks and this often frees your mind, at least, for more satisfying activities.

One might guess that Katie (Mrs. Can't Get Going) and Judy (Mrs. Always Behind Time) may not find enough satisfactions. Katie may have spent her energies in putting-off and Judy in never catching up with her plans. Katie has exhausted her time resources without getting anything done, and Judy may be unhappy because she planned more than she could accomplish.

Unselfishness and kindness must be built in all mental health and management. Perhaps a hermit could set goals, plan activities, carry plans through and say, "I'm satisfied." But we live in a world with others. Mental health experts insist that the selfish person forgets that others have goals and values, and that others operate under the rules of time and energy also. These selfish persons lack one essential attribute--understanding. They take but cannot give.

One may well wonder what Judy's colleagues think when she is 20 minutes late for a committee meeting of which she is chairman. Mental health specialists point out that one who keeps others waiting is practicing rudeness and saying, in effect, "My affairs are more important than your affairs."



Home management specialists stress that homemaking is something to be shared by everyone in the home. It involves the giving and taking. A sense of values in arriving at desired goals must be uppermost in the minds of family members.

Mental health is not static. Feelings of satisfaction should not imply conformity. Work which continually challenges one's capacities without taxing them beyond limits enhances abilities and satisfactions. A mental stretch as well as a physical stretch is exhilarating for all of us.

Management is aimed toward change, and continually improved methods and results. You really don't know how much you can accomplish until you try. The step taken toward a definite pattern of improvement leads to a more realistic and more effective management.

The mental health of an individual is reflected in how effective he feels in the business of living. Planned, purposeful management can make major contributions to effective living.