



## Member Pulse



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# Welcome to MHN Member Pulse!

**Goodbye, *MHN Member Matters*; Hello, *MHN Member Pulse*!**

Welcome to our new member blog – *MHN Member Pulse*!

*MHN Member Pulse* is your new source for living a healthy, happy and well-balanced life. Every week, we'll feature a new article on emotional health, relationships, work and life, or wellness.

With a fresh look and other updates, *MHN Member Pulse* will also make it easy for you to:

- Read articles on your mobile devices.
- Subscribe to weekly blog updates using an RSS feed
- Go straight to the articles you want to read – without logging in to the EAP member website.

We hope you enjoy the new *MHN Member Pulse*!



## Tips for Communicating Effectively With Your Boss

Just the thought of communicating with your boss can be enough to produce stress and anxiety. However, with a little preparation and practice, you can be on your way to confident and effective communication.

- Before you speak to your boss, write down all the topics you want to discuss and what you hope to communicate.
- Make sure you're clear about what you want or need from your boss.
- In private, rehearse what you want to say to your boss.
- When speaking to your boss, use qualifying words, such as "perhaps" and "maybe," rather than absolute words, such as "always," "every," "all the time" and "never." Speaking in absolutes can raise a person's defenses and cause resistance.
- Make "I" statements, such as "I need guidance," instead of "you" statements, such as "You haven't given me guidance."
- Avoid going to your boss when you're emotional. Give yourself a cooling-off period to collect your thoughts and composure.
- If at all possible, talk to your boss before issues become heated and you become emotionally involved.
- Be an active listener. Learn to really listen and understand what your boss says. If you missed or weren't clear about a point, ask your boss to repeat or clarify it.
- Try to repeat and rephrase the points your boss makes during a conversation to show that you're listening and understanding him or her.
- Practice good body language. Look at your boss, lean into the conversation and avoid fidgeting.
- Be assertive, not aggressive.
- Keep an open mind and be open to compromise.
- Avoid gossiping or spreading rumors to your boss.
- Have a positive attitude.
- Be sure to give your boss praise and recognition when it's due.
- Communicate regularly with your boss to develop and maintain a comfortable relationship.
- Be a problem solver. If you see an issue, brainstorm solutions on your own and approach your boss with some recommendations. Proactively be on the lookout for ways to improve the quality of your work, reduce costs or increase efficiency.



## Job Satisfaction: How to Make Work More Rewarding

Stress mounts when job satisfaction falls. Here's a look at some of the causes of job dissatisfaction — and practical ways to boost job satisfaction.

Do you find yourself dreading the start of the workweek? Or wishing the current workday away? Are you no longer enthusiastic about your job?

In a challenging economy, you may not feel that you can simply change jobs — but you might be able to change how you think about your job to improve your job satisfaction.

### Understand the link between work approach and job satisfaction

If you've gone sour on your job, take some time to think about what motivates and inspires you — and how you approach your work. For example:

- **It's a job.** If you approach work as a job, you focus primarily on the financial rewards. The nature of the work may hold little interest for you. What's important is the money. If a job with more pay comes your way, you'll likely move on.
- **It's a career.** If you approach work as a career, you're likely interested in advancement. Your current job may just be a steppingstone to your ultimate goal. What's important is to be regarded as a success in your field.
- **It's a calling.** If you approach your job as a calling, you focus on the work itself. You're less interested in financial gain or career advancement, preferring instead to find a sense of fulfillment from the work itself.

One approach isn't necessarily better, and you might find elements of all three perspectives important. Still, if you're unsatisfied with your job, it's helpful to reflect on why you work. Think about what originally drew you to your current job, and whether it may be a factor in your lack of job satisfaction. Understanding what motivates you in your work can help you reframe your expectations and make choices to increase your satisfaction.

### Consider strategies to improve job satisfaction

Regardless of why you work, there are strategies that can help breathe new life into your job. For example:

- **Create new challenges.** Take on a project that can motivate you and give you a sense of control. Start small, such as organizing a work-related celebration, before moving on to larger goals. Working on something you care about can boost your confidence and job satisfaction.
- **Mentor a colleague.** Once you've mastered a job, you may find it too routine. Helping a new team member or an intern advance his or her skills can restore the challenge and the job satisfaction you desire.

- **Expand your skills.** If you're feeling bored, ask your supervisor about cross-training. Perhaps you could train for new or additional tasks. If your company is launching a new project, volunteer for the team.
- **Learn from your mistakes.** Don't let setbacks erode your job satisfaction. When you make a mistake at work, learn from it and try again. If you receive a less than stellar appraisal, ask about attending seminars or taking classes to improve your performance.
- **Stay positive.** Use positive thinking to reframe your thoughts about your job. When you catch yourself thinking your job is terrible, stop the thought in its tracks. Remember, everyone encounters good days and bad days on the job.
- **Be grateful.** Gratitude can help you focus on what's positive about your job. Ask yourself, "What am I grateful for at work today?" If it's only that you're having lunch with a friendly colleague, that's OK. Find at least one thing you're grateful for and savor it.
- **Nurture your passion.** If your job satisfaction has waned, but seeking a new job isn't a realistic option, you might consider your current job as a welcome paycheck that allows you to focus your energy on interests outside of work. Sometimes work is simply a means to enjoy those things you're truly passionate about.

### **More job satisfaction can mean less stress**

Whether your work is a job, a career or a calling, you can take steps to restore meaning to your job. Make the best of difficult work situations by maintaining a positive attitude. Be creative as you think of ways to change your circumstances — or how you view your circumstances. Doing so can help you manage your stress and experience the rewards of your profession.



## **Stress Relievers: Tips to Tame Stress**

Stress getting to you? Try some of these tips for stress relief.

Is stress making you frustrated and irritable? Stress relievers can help restore calm and serenity to your chaotic life. You don't have to invest a lot of time or thought into stress relievers. If your stress is getting out of control and you need quick relief, try one of these tips.

### **Get active**

Virtually any form of physical activity can act as a stress reliever. Even if you're not an athlete or you're out of shape, exercise is still a good stress reliever.

Physical activity pumps up your feel-good endorphins and other natural neural chemicals that enhance your sense of well-being. Exercise also refocuses your mind on your body's movements, improving your mood and helping the day's irritations fade away. Consider walking, jogging, gardening, housecleaning, biking, swimming, weightlifting or anything else that gets you active.

### **Laugh more**

A good sense of humor can't cure all ailments, but it can help you feel better, even if you have to force a fake laugh through your grumpiness. When you laugh, it not only lightens your mental load but also causes positive physical changes in your body. Laughter fires up and then cools down your stress response. So read some jokes, tell some jokes, watch a comedy or hang out with your funny friends.

### **Connect with others**

When you're stressed and irritable, your instinct may be to wrap yourself in a cocoon. Instead, reach out to family and friends and make social connections.

Social contact is a good stress reliever because it offers distraction, provides support, and helps you tolerate life's up and downs. So take a coffee break with a friend, email a relative, or visit your place of worship. Got more time? Considering volunteering for a charitable group and help yourself while helping others.

### **Assert yourself**

You might want to do it all, but you can't, at least not without paying a price. Learning to say no or being willing to delegate can help you manage your to-do list and your stress.

Saying yes may seem like an easy way to keep the peace, prevent conflicts and get the job done right. But it may actually cause you internal conflict because your needs and those of your family come second, which can lead to stress, anger, resentment and even the desire to exact revenge. And that's not a very calm and peaceful reaction.

## **Try yoga**

With its series of postures and controlled-breathing exercises, yoga is a popular stress reliever. Yoga brings together physical and mental disciplines to achieve peacefulness of body and mind, helping you relax and manage stress and anxiety. Try yoga on your own or find a class — you can find classes in most communities. Hatha yoga, in particular, is a good stress reliever because of its slower pace and easier movements.

## **Get enough sleep**

Stress often gives sleep the heave-ho. When you have too much to do — and too much to think about — your sleep suffers. But sleep is the time when your brain and body recharge.

And the quality and amount of sleep you get affects your mood, energy level, concentration and overall functioning. If you have sleep troubles, make sure that you have a quiet, relaxing bedtime routine, listen to soothing music, put clocks away, and stick to a consistent schedule.

## **Keep a journal**

Writing down your thoughts and feelings can be a good release for otherwise pent-up emotions. Don't think about what to write — just let it happen. Write whatever comes to mind. No one else needs to read it, so don't strive for perfection in grammar or spelling. Just let your thoughts flow on paper — or computer screen. Once you're done, you can toss out what you wrote or save it to reflect on later.

## **Get musical and be creative**

Listening to or playing music is a good stress reliever because it provides a mental distraction, reduces muscle tension and decreases stress hormones. Crank up the volume and let your mind be absorbed by the music.

If music isn't your thing, turn your attention to another hobby you enjoy, such as gardening, sewing, sketching — anything that requires you to focus on what you're doing rather than what you think you should be doing.

## **Seek counseling**

If new stressors are challenging your ability to cope or if self-care measures just aren't relieving your stress, you may need to look for reinforcements in the form of therapy or counseling. Therapy also may be a good idea if you feel overwhelmed or trapped, if you worry excessively, or if you have trouble carrying out daily routines or meeting responsibilities at work, home or school. Professional counselors or therapists can help you identify sources of your stress and learn new coping tools.



## Work-life Balance: Tips to Reclaim Control

When your work life and personal life are out of balance, your stress level is likely to soar. Use these practical strategies to restore harmony.

There was a time when the boundaries between work and home were fairly clear. Today, however, work is likely to invade your personal life — and maintaining work-life balance is no simple task. This might be especially true if you're concerned about losing your job due to restructuring, layoffs or other factors.

Still, work-life balance isn't out of reach.

Start by evaluating your relationship to work. Then apply specific strategies to help you strike a healthier balance.

### Married to your work? Consider the cost

It can be tempting to rack up hours at work, especially if you're trying to earn a promotion or manage an ever-increasing workload — or simply keep your head above water. Sometimes overtime might even be required. If you're spending most of your time working, though, your home life will take a hit.

Consider the consequences of poor work-life balance:

- **Fatigue.** When you're tired, your ability to work productively and think clearly might suffer — which could take a toll on your professional reputation or lead to dangerous or costly mistakes.
- **Lost time with friends and loved ones.** If you're working too much, you might miss important family events or milestones. This can leave you feeling left out and might harm relationships with your loved ones. It's also difficult to nurture friendships if you're always working.
- **Increased expectations.** If you regularly work extra hours, you might be given more responsibility — which could lead to additional concerns and challenges.

### Strike a better work-life balance

As long as you're working, juggling the demands of career and personal life will probably be an ongoing challenge. Consider these ideas to find the work-life balance that's best for you:

- **Track your time.** Pay attention to your daily tasks, including work-related and personal activities. Decide what's necessary and what satisfies you the most. Cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy or can't handle — or share your concerns and possible solutions with your employer or others.
- **Take advantage of your options.** Ask your employer about flex hours, a compressed workweek, job sharing, telecommuting or other scheduling flexibility. The more control you have over your hours, the less stressed you're likely to be.

- **Learn to say no.** Whether it's a co-worker asking you to spearhead an extra project or your child's teacher asking you to organize a class party, remember that it's OK to respectfully say no. When you quit accepting tasks out of guilt or a false sense of obligation, you'll have more time for the activities that are meaningful to you.
- **Leave work at work.** With the technology to connect to anyone at any time from virtually anywhere, there might be no boundary between work and home — unless you create it. Make a conscious decision to separate work time from personal time. When you're with your family, for instance, keep your laptop in your briefcase.
- **Manage your time.** Organize household tasks efficiently, such as running errands in batches or doing a load of laundry every day, rather than saving it all for your day off. Put family events on a weekly family calendar and keep a daily to-do list. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go.
- **Bolster your support system.** At work, join forces with co-workers who can cover for you — and vice versa — when family conflicts arise. At home, enlist trusted friends and loved ones to pitch in with child care or household responsibilities when you need to work overtime or travel.
- **Nurture yourself.** Eat a healthy diet, include physical activity in your daily routine and get enough sleep. Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as practicing yoga or reading. Better yet, discover activities you can do with your partner, family or friends — such as hiking, dancing or taking cooking classes.

### **Know when to seek professional help**

Everyone needs help from time to time. If your life feels too chaotic to manage and you're spinning your wheels worrying about it, talk with a professional — such as a counselor or other mental health provider. Take advantage of your Employee Assistance Program.

Remember, striking a healthy work-life balance isn't a one-shot deal. Creating work-life balance is a continuous process as your family, interests and work life change. Periodically examine your priorities — and make changes, if necessary — to make sure you're keeping on track.

**Getting Started is Easy!**  
**Call your EAP for more information**