

# The Sand Paper

Summer 2008



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RESOURCES WITHOUT BARRIERS

## It's Summertime; Is Your Living Easy?

by Dr. Gretchen Stein, President & CEO of The Sand Creek Group.

The song "Summertime" from Gershwin's opera Porgy and Bess often comes to me at this time of year.

*Summertime,  
And the livin' is easy  
Fish are jumpin'  
And the cotton is high*

*Your daddy's rich  
And your mamma's good  
lookin'  
So hush little baby  
Don't you cry*

*One of these mornings  
You're going to rise up  
singing  
Then you'll spread your  
wings  
And you'll take to the sky*

*But till that morning  
There's a'nothing can harm  
you  
With daddy and mamma  
standing by.*

Summer does conjure up thoughts of longer days, filled with sunlight and easy living. But for most of us life is not as stress free as a Gershwin tune. Challenges sometimes come, unplanned, that turn our lives upside down. Other stressors are predictable but cannot be addressed until they actually come our way. The lead article in this summer edition of The Sand Paper addresses

these types of life challenges in a discussion of caring for our elders who predictably are getting older, and need more assistance, and also what to do when an unplanned event impacts health and well-being for the elder and, ultimately, for you as care giver.

The second article in this edition encourages us all to take a vacation. Too many workers are not getting away from work to refresh and replenish. This article gives a persuasive message that should make us all start scheduling needed time away. Do it for your health and well-being. Time away will also make you a more productive worker when you return. Relaxation is one of the best stress reducers. Are you feeling overburdened with stress? When was the last time you truly got away from it all? Yes, this means leaving the cell phone and email behind. Disconnect and reconnect with the joyful part of yourself and your loved ones.

Summertime is a good time to bring your hopes and dreams for your life into the



light of day. Are there changes you could make in your life that could bring you more happiness and satisfaction? Your employee assistance program is here to help you talk through your life challenges with the hope of finding new solutions. Often times, having someone else with a different perspective look at a problem can be most helpful. Want some new ideas? Give us a call. We are here to help you.



*“Every time you have a plan, know that it may need to change.”*

## The Ups & Downs of Supporting an Aging Parent by Diane Johnson, MSW, LISW, CEAP

After Mom died, Dad figured out a whole new routine for himself to keep his independence and stay in the house. Even though he was lonely, he said he found such comfort in the home he and Mom had shared for 40 years. My sister and I agreed to do everything we could to support Dad being at home.

The carefully balanced routine we established came crashing down when Dad tripped, fell, and broke his hip. There was surgery, a lengthy hospital stay with various setbacks including pneumonia, drug induced paranoia, a question of dementia setting in. There was the rehab facility with physical therapy and the frailty that comes from trauma and lack of mobility for several weeks. And finally, 3 months after his fall, we were told he was ready to be discharged but would need daily assistance to live at home.

The resulting changes in Dad’s health meant long term needs that would demand a great deal from each of us. Since my sister had a new job with limited flexibility and time off, many of the work week calls, doctor appointments, and errands became my responsibility. Fortunately my employer was supportive, but I couldn’t keep it up forever. I had trouble sleeping at night, trouble shutting off my

thoughts, and I couldn’t concentrate at home or work. Most of all, I couldn’t stop feeling guilty about everything.

This scenario or a version of it occurs every day in someone’s life, and what starts as a crisis or acute need all too often becomes consuming. We may be more reactive or perhaps numb. We go into survival mode. And in a defining moment, what we had hoped would be a short term challenge now appears to be a long term need with no end in sight. It is often at this point when family members realize the impact of the situation on their future, time, resources and other relationships. There may be a longing for life to return to a previous normal, but also a growing awareness that the intense and constant demands of care giving are the “new normal”.

Symptoms of stress during this process may include headaches, irritability, anxiety, fatigue, poor sleeping, feeling out of control, chronic guilt, and a sense of not doing enough while feeling resentment at doing so much. There are no easy answers as we care for an aging parent, and many parental relationships are complex before a health crisis. A few suggestions to consider include:

Give yourself permission to

not do everything even though someone may be disappointed.

Consider that you may have to make decisions that are counter to how things have been done previously in your family.

Use “I” statements vs. “you” statements as much as possible.

Give yourself permission to say “this is hard” or “I hate how this is right now”. Labeling our feelings can help diffuse their intensity.

Be aware of how you deal with sadness, anger, resentment, and guilt. Sometimes we make decisions so we can avoid the resulting feelings rather than our belief that it is the best decision.

Acknowledge the need for increased emotional and physical support for yourself. This may mean asking for or accepting help through resources you have not used before such as social service agencies, neighbors, church members, etc..

Every time you have a plan, know that it may need to change.

Because this is a journey that many of us make, it is helpful to learn from one another. Consider talking with friends or family about their experiences and always consider using Sand Creek EAP as a resource.

## What Help Is Available?

If you called the Sand Creek Group today with an eldercare concern, there are a variety of resources that we may be able to offer. If you need emotional support and/or a chance to sort through what is happening, you could speak with a counselor face to face or telephonically. If you have legal questions related to an elder's estate, power of attorney, etc. we can refer you for legal consultation. You may have questions about an elder's financial situation and if so, you could consult with one of our financial counselors. You may want help in understanding all of the many eldercare resources that exist in the community, and you could speak with

one of our providers who is an eldercare specialist. There are a variety of ways to receive services through the EAP for many of life's issues, including eldercare.



## Vacation: What's That?

*by Lisa Dau, MA, LP, CEAP*

When was the last time you took a vacation? Jobs can be demanding and many employees report they are burnt out, yet almost half of American workers do not use all of their vacation time.

The three main reasons given for not using vacation time are stress, job security and money. The majority of workers indicate they have trouble coping with the stress before, during and after vacation, so they just don't bother taking time away. Others worry about job security. They fear that if they are out of sight, they are also out of mind. Some even report that their

supervisor or coworkers send messages of not wanting them to be gone for too long of a time. Lastly, some employees identify that they don't have the money for a vacation or they want to save vacation time for emergencies.

An additional variable that adds to stress around vacations is that employees report staying linked to the office via cell phones, the Internet, Blackberries and other connections. About a quarter of vacationers indicate they still check voicemail and email while on vacation. They report that it is a combination of being expected to keep in touch, as well as a desire to be "in the know". A smaller number report that it's easier to handle things as they come up rather than return to them later. One in three workers actually reported that not checking messages while on

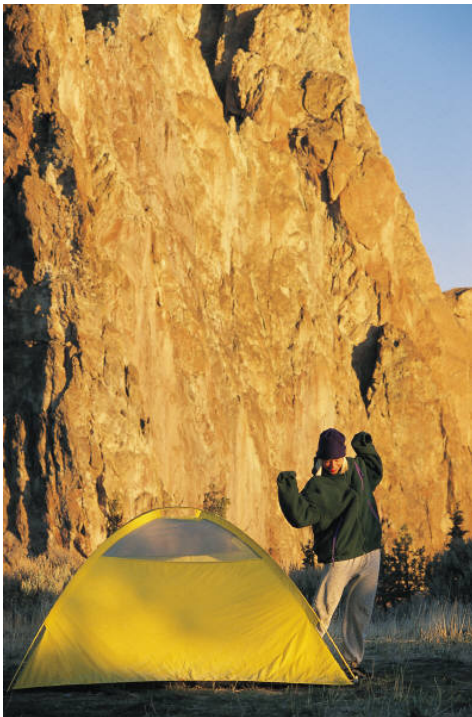
vacation was more stressful than the actual work itself.

But it is important to take your vacation. Almost 40 percent of workers who do take vacations say they feel better about their jobs and are more productive at work. The office will no doubt survive without you and it'll reap the rewards of a well-rested workforce. Also, shortened vacations and unused vacation time can backfire. If employees don't take enough vacation time, stress and circumstances can build and result in unscheduled absences or absenteeism resulting from illness.

A few tips to keep in mind when planning your vacation:

Decide to take care of as much work as you can before leaving for vacation. That way you can more readily free your mind from worries about unfinished work and the

## Vacation (from page 3)



dread of what is waiting upon your return.

Identify a back-up person. With the productivity demands of our jobs today, it's very realistic to assume that some of your work will have to be addressed while you are away. Identify a colleague who will serve as your back up: brief the person on the work or any key issues and leave organized files and notes. Offer to reciprocate when that person goes on vacation.

Change greetings. Make sure your voicemail and email greeting clearly state you are on vacation with no access to messages. Offer an alternative colleague's contact information for any time sensitive issues and be sure to reiterate that you will not respond until you return. That way you don't have to worry that a contact or client is left uncared for or thinks that you're just not responding.

Give contact information to one person. Don't tell everyone at work how to reach you. Let one key person know how to get a hold of you if something urgent arises. Really get away, which means they don't call you and you don't call them.

Set limits on work. If you're someone who just has to stay in touch, there's nothing wrong with checking email or

messages on occasion. But if your phone is constantly ringing or you're preoccupied with work, it's not fair or pleasant for those who are on vacation with you. Decide before you go, and communicate with those you're on vacation with, what your work parameters will be.

Don't have anything scheduled on your first day back. Use that as your check-in and catch-up day.

Remember that a vacation doesn't have to be an expensive trip somewhere. Just take one to two weeks off work and sleep in, re-engage your hobbies, visit friends, do small day trips, etc. The key element of a vacation is that it is something that recharges your batteries and everyone is different in how they do that.

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## Dear Sandy,

This is going to seem heartless on my part, but I am tired of filling in for my coworker. Her Mom died last year and, understandably, she was distracted and withdrawn

for several weeks. I was totally supportive. Then her Dad got sick and she missed a lot of time for his medical appointments, made many personal calls related to his care and I

started to feel like I couldn't count on her. I can see that she is stressed and I feel badly for her, but I need her to do her job. What should I do?

*Tired of It!*



*"It can be a hard conversation to start but it seems important to let her know that you want to be supportive..."*

## Dear Tired of It!,

As you describe what has happened in your coworker's life and the impact on you, it sounds like it is a build-up of behaviors that you are tired of. It is a common challenge in the workplace to figure out how to respond to a coworker's illness or family crisis when it has an impact on us. On the one hand, most of us feel compassion and concern and want to do what we can to be supportive and accommodate. The difficulty occurs when the informal accommodation and personal needs don't seem to end. When the events are cumulative and lengthy it is natural to feel our support turn to frustration.

A starting place is for you is to identify the behaviors that are bothering you. Is it her time away from work? Is it the phone calls? Is it that she is not getting work done? When you identify what is bothering you, ask yourself what the impact is

on you. If she is not getting work done, does it affect your ability to complete your work? Do you have to alter your schedule to accommodate her needs? Does it bother your work ethic? Then consider what you would like her to do differently. There may be some things she can change and some things she can't. If you believe it is a performance issue, it is important that you talk with your supervisor about that and be clear about the behaviors and the impact on you.

If it is more of a personal issue for you, then I would encourage you to talk with her directly. When any of us have a personal crisis, it is easy to be caught up in our own world and not see our behavior having an impact on others. Your coworker may or may not realize the impact of her actions. It can be a hard conversation to start but it seems important to let her know that you want to be supportive and there are

some things that are now making it hard for you. Let her know if there are things she can do that would help you have more confidence in her doing her job and being responsive to your needs. If it seems too hard to have this conversation without help, consider talking with your EAP or your supervisor to get more support and consultation.

*Sandy*

*Send Sandy your inquiries at [info@sandcreekeap.com](mailto:info@sandcreekeap.com). We may not be able to publish all inquiries, but all will be responded to via email. Thank you.*

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## Financial Literacy Workshops

The Sand Creek Group has recently seen an upswing in requests for financial counseling services. Given the challenging economic environment we are all dealing with, this isn't a big surprise. Sand Creek is helping individuals and families deal with these concerns.

To complement the counseling services we provide to our clients, we are now offering on-site financial literacy training to help employees understand the principles of personal financial management and to make sound decisions in these challenging times.

Presentations will be tailored to the needs of your employees, and can be offered as a single session or within a series of skills-building classes. To find out more about these options, contact any of the counseling staff at The Sand Creek Group.

## About Our Organization

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers free, confidential assessment, short-term counseling, referral, and follow up. Professional counselors are experienced in helping people identify and find solutions to personal issues such as:

- Relationships
- Parent/Child Issues
- Substance Abuse
- Gambling
- Loss and Grief
- Financial Concerns
- Depression
- Job Stress
- Childcare or Eldercare
- Other Life Concerns

Sand Creek EAP is your program. It's completely confidential, provided at no cost to you, and is available to both you and your household family members. When you need help with personal concerns, we're the place to turn.

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