

COMMENTARY

Despite tough times, there is hope

All of us who live in Cedar Rapids, Iowa City and the surrounding communities are too aware of some of the challenging changes that we have been facing over the past few years. Many business owners, individuals and families have seen their lives change substantially because of the June 2008 flood, the economic situation and the increase in unemployment.

At first glance, one might conclude that the major impact from these changes would be primarily financial. Along with this financial impact can also come some emotional consequences. Some of the more common emotional concerns are stress, depression and anxiety.

Stress is a natural part of life. Life without stress would be dull and boring, but too much of it becomes unpleasant and tiring. Stress is a physical and psychological response to a demand, a threat or a problem that requires a solution or action. Continual exposure to negative stress lowers the body's ability to cope in general. Stress is a process that builds, so it is important to be aware of the signs and to get the necessary help.

In many cases, individuals can have stress reactions, depression and anxiety, and they may not even be aware of the full impact upon them, what the symptoms are or how to address the problem.

Some common responses to stress, depression and anxiety may include turning to unhealthy activities (such as an increase in emotional eating and alcohol), an increase in irritability and conflict, a decrease in coping skills, feeling sad, worry and fear, fatigue, digestive problems, sleep problems, headaches, negativity, withdrawal, easily distracted, reduced motivation, loss of meaning and a lack of joy.

Although this is not a complete list of all of the symptoms for a diagnosis in depression, anxiety or stress, it may help to identify a need to reach out to either a physi-



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cian or a licensed mental health professional for further evaluation.

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You may be observing some of these symptoms in your employees. This presents an opportunity to provide encouragement to

that employee to reach out to their Employee Assistance Program for an assessment and referral to counseling. There are many situations in which the employer may notice some attendance or performance problems with the employee. When the Employee Assistance Program counselor evaluates the employee, frequently the root cause of the attendance or performance problem is directly linked to stress reaction, depression or anxiety. With some counseling, the employee can learn some new skills and strategies that can help to enjoy a better quality of life, as well as an improved performance in the workplace.

Some general guidelines that might be helpful to those who are struggling with financial and/or emotional changes would be the following:

- Don't panic or overreact. Refrain from getting caught up in the doom and gloom hype. Remain calm and stay focused.
- Take control and put a detailed plan down in writing as to how you can reduce expenses and manage finances more efficiently.

COMMENTARY continues on page 19

COMMENTARY

continued from page 14

- Seek professional support such as credit counseling, financial planners, physician or a mental health counselor.
- Learn to laugh, watch comedy movies.
- Take time for yourself every day (even if it is 10 minutes).
- Maintain a routine for eating, sleeping and waking at the same time each day.
- Express yourself, talk to someone who will listen.
- Start exercising, walking, dancing, yoga.
- Eat healthy; reduce alcohol, caffeine and refined sugar.
- Practice rest and relaxation; get at least seven hours of sleep per day.
- Turn to your faith.

Although times of trouble can cause us much stress and grief, they can also present us with opportunities for growth and positive change in our lives. Despite the economic condition and our emotional struggles, there is hope, for the human spirit is now, and will always remain, resilient.

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