

LEISURE, HEALTH AND STRESS

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"Leisure, Health and Stress"

The term 'leisure' derives from the Latin 'licere', meaning "to be permitted", and is defined in the modern dictionary as "freedom from occupation, employment, or engagement.

Leisure has meant different things in different cultures, and today, unfortunately, there is too little agreement as to what it does mean, and what it implies. Leisure is seen by many as freedom from work. Others view it as an instrument for social control, a status symbol, an organic necessity, a state of calm, quiet, contemplative dignity, or a spiritual, aesthetic, cultural condition.

No matter how one tries to modify the concept of leisure, 'time' is its essence. Leisure can no more be divorced from the element of 'time' than it can be completely separated from the function of 'work'. Ultimately, leisure must be identified with 'when' quite as much if not more than, the 'how'. This is not to deny, however, that it is the endless ways in which leisure can be used, for good or bad, which makes it significant.

Time:

Leisure, then, is a block of unoccupied time, spare time, or free time when we are free to rest or do what we choose. Leisure is time beyond that which is required for 'existence', the things which we must do, biologically, to stay alive (that is, eat,

sleep, eliminate, medicate and so on); and 'subsistence' the things we must do to make a living as in work, or prepare to make a living as in school, or pay for what we want done if we do not do it ourselves. Leisure is time in which our feelings of compulsion should be minimal. It is 'discretionary' time, the time to be used according to our own judgment or choice.

These three types of time are used in vastly different ways but they do have common characteristics. Each time pattern is highly flexible and may be increased or decreased, depending upon various circumstances and conditions. Also, none of these can be defined in terms of what is 'good' or what is 'bad' use.

Just as there are different kinds of time, there are two modes of leisure - true leisure and enforced leisure. 'True' leisure and enforced leisure. True leisure is not imposed upon us. 'Enforced' leisure is the leisure we do not seek - it is the time the victim of a confining illness has on his hands, it is the "time off" which one gets when he has reached the retirement age, even though he is fit and wants to continue.

Work:

To speak highly of leisure is not to disparage or ignore the importance of work. Of all the claims which can be made for its attractiveness, leisure as a substitute for work is not among them. Work is a symbol of growth which challenges and brings a renewal of motives. Work carries with it the feelings of purposefulness and usefulness which are so indispensable to our

self-respect. It has its own built-in incentives. Admittedly, we humans would be badly off without the inducements, accomplishments, and satisfactions which come from labour. On the other hand, we should not be too much tied to work. When work becomes an end in itself, when one cannot enjoy the things for which he has worked because he is too weary or does not have the time or the desire to enjoy them, work is clearly a liability.

Moreover, our attitudes toward leisure and what we do with it are related to our job attitudes. Yet even though leisure may help restore man for work, it does not exist 'for' the state of work. Leisure has a much larger and higher role than this. To look upon leisure 'only' as a respite from work is never to discover its full potential. Leisure is the foundation of culture beyond the utilitarian world. It is man's eternal opportunity to overcome his inner impoverishments, although it constitutes no guarantee that he will do so.

Leisure as a Form of Activity:

Leisure can be viewed as 'nonwork behaviour in which people engage during free time'. Leisure experience, in a behavioural context includes all the potential nonwork opportunities available to people. Leisure is voluntary activity carried on in free time, in sharp contrast with work, which is required, is utilitarian, and is rewarded in economic terms" (Kraus, 1971). According to Joffre Dumazedier (1967) leisure fulfills three functions: relaxation, entertainment, and personal development.

Relaxation "provides the individual recovery from fatigue", entertainment "spells deliverance from boredom", and personal development "serves to liberate the individual from the daily automatism of thought and action". To Dumazedier, "Leisure is activity - apart from the obligations of work, family, and society - to which the individual turns at will, for either relaxation, diversion, or broadening his individual and his spontaneous social participation, the free exercise of his creative capacity.

In Industrial society, leisure is separate from the rest of man's life. It has become not a part of life, but a means to life - a thing of extrinsic value, useful only because it relaxes and restores the individual for work. The meaning of leisure in a given civilization depends on the meaning given to work..... What the individual demands of leisure depends on what he has and has not found in his work, and on what the education he received has made him (Aron 1962)'.

The Work-Leisure Dichotomy:

Work is a symbol of growth which challenges and brings a renewal of motives. Work carries with it the feelings of purposefulness and usefulness.

In nearly all the studies that have investigated the connections between work and leisure it has been implicitly assumed that if these two areas of life are related it is because work exercises an influence upon the way in which people spend

their free time. This implicit assumption needs to be made explicit and openly questioned because today there are strong grounds for arguing that leisure exercises a reciprocal influence upon the nature of people's working lives.

Some sociologists have been primarily concerned with understanding the role of leisure in contemporary society and have been more definite in their conclusions about the extent to which leisure influences work.

Historically leisure was created by industry, but today, Anderson argues, it is leisure that imports a meaning to work for the bulk of the industrial population. People work in order to be able to do desirable things in their leisure time, and it is this instrumental role which has come to give work a meaning in people's leisure-based lives.

Dumazedier, has developed this line of argument still further. Upon the basis of investigations undertaken in France he alleges today rather than their leisure being determined by the types of jobs that they do, people choose a job that will enable them to enjoy the type of leisure that they want. He asserts that leisure is so central in the life of modern man that industry is being obliged to adapt its own structure to accommodate leisure values.

Idleness is not synonymous with leisure, even though some would think of leisure as idleness. Idleness is avoidance of work. But a distinction must be made between 'idleness' when work is available and 'unemployment' or 'under-employment' when

work is not available. Idleness is individual, a voluntary matter. Unemployment or under-employment is a social and economic condition and is seldom voluntary.

One may enjoy idleness for brief periods, but not unemployment, which confirms in part the linkages between work and leisure. Leisure as free time is positive whereas unemployment is negative.

The inter-relationships between work and leisure in modern society are extremely complex and the complexity of this problem is matched only by its importance for it is this relationship that sets the rhythm and style of contemporary life.

Work - The Dominant Rhythm of Life:

Murphy (1974) has indicated that work-leisure connection can be looked at from three different chromatic perspectives. In the traditional American culture leisure is viewed as unobligated time to be earned and re-earned by the worker. Work (according to the blue model; (See Fig. 1) is the dominant rhythm of society and leisure is valued as reward for people who are gainfully employed. One cannot claim 'virtuous leisure' if he has not earned it, therefore, the central focus is a steady pattern of productive work. All other aspects of social life, including family relationships, existence requirements, engagement in community and civic activity, and political, educational and religious participation, gain significance in their relation to the work requirements of the culture. The traditional work

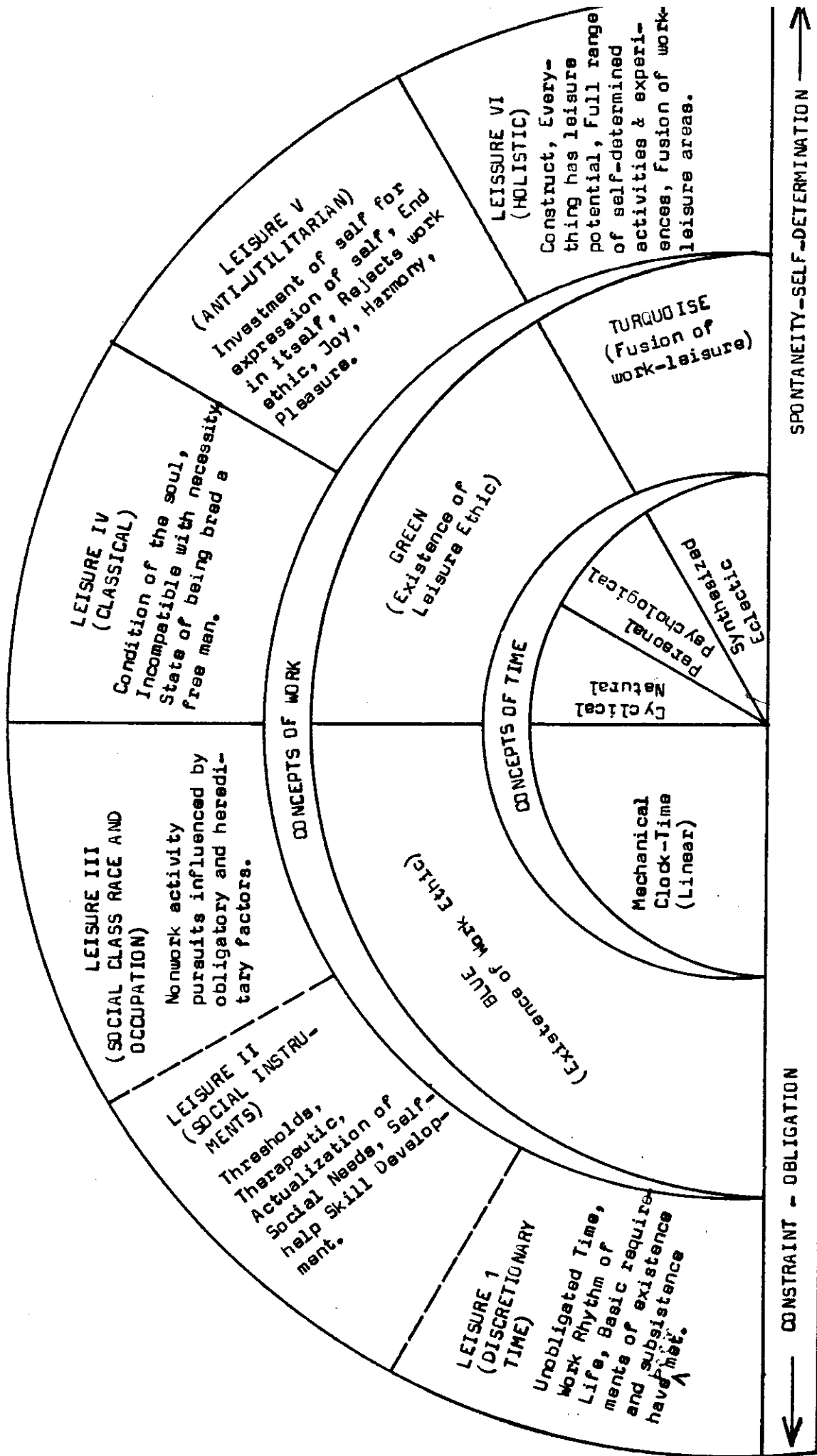
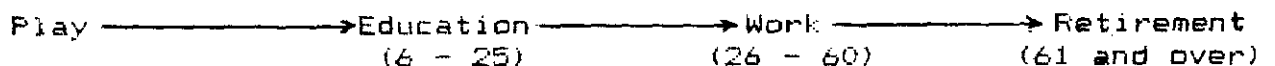


Fig 1 : Toward a Dynamic Conceptualization of Leisure.

rhythm of a scarce economy required people to work long hours and to be frugal with time and money, merely to survive. However, the definition of leisure as recuperation, relaxation, and reward for hard work is changing with decreased emphasis on the old rhythm in which one enjoyed work and was permitted limited relaxed nonwork activity.

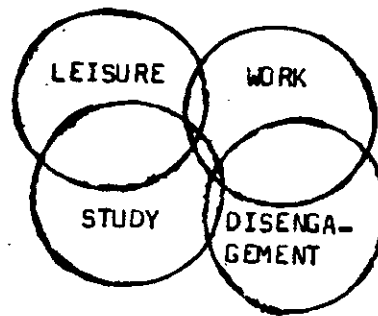
The sequential-linear pattern of living in traditional culture is illustrated in fig 2 below.

Fig 2: Contemporary Linear Sequential Life Patterning



A more natural rhythmical, cyclical pattern of human development, involving play, education, work, and disengagement (formerly known as retirement) would conceivably allow contemporary technological man to synthesize his experiences. According to Fig. 3, all aspects of human endeavour, including leisure, work, and study are recognised as blending harmoniously into a common rhythm of life, not dictated by or based solely on the organisation of work.

Fig. 3 : Ecology of Human Life Patterning



Leisure and Health

Sometimes, if we are not ill, our physical comfort lulls us into a false sense of security and we take our well-being for granted. Many of us think of health only as an absence of illness. It is much more than that. It is a state of being which extends beyond just "feeling good". It enters the "plus" margin of physical, mental, and social well-being. It is being free from disease, infection, and disability, but it is also being physically, emotionally, morally, socially and spiritually fit. Poor health begets depression and worry which in turn, accelerate the degenerative process. Not only do we enjoy our leisure more when we are healthy but we are actually healthier when we enjoy our leisure.

If we have sound health there are things we can do to keep it. We need to eat and drink sensibly, have proper amounts of rest and exercise, regular medical care, followed by well-balanced schedules of work and recreation.

Of all the values that the medical authorities and educators claim for the recreational use of leisure none is mentioned more

frequently than its potential for helping attain sound health, if we participate in it sensibly. It tends to enhance our well-being, soften the blows which undermine our health, and help make life more livable.

Mental Health:

If what we do in leisure can help our physical health, it is appropriate to consider its role in 'mental' health. In between the debit and credit side of the mental health ledger is the matter of leisure. It will increase, but whether it turns out to be an asset or a liability, in relation to our soundness of mind, is something else. One pitfall is that leisure provides too much opportunity to think about ourselves, to make us more self-centred. If we can use leisure to 'create', to 'express', and 'serve', then it could become a dynamo for, rather than a drag upon the healthy mind. Immersion in wholesome and satisfying use of leisure is a stranger to melancholy apprehension. Those things which make us tense and afraid, which frustrate us and make us angry, bitter and resentful - the feelings which cause our emotional upsets, - seldom occur in the enjoyable moments of leisure.

If we use it well, leisure can help to keep us on an even mental keel. It is a change in setting and pace from the highly competitive world of work and can become a form of relaxation that is indispensable to emotional stability.

If we can in our leisure, establish a world apart from ourselves and get temporary relief from our tensions, anxieties,

and frustrations, the better are our chances of dealing with problems without coming apart at the seams. Our attitudes influence our emotional stability. Leisure can help remove the compulsive pressures of the outer world. It is not only that we can find in leisure socially acceptable outlets for our aggressive, regressive and sadomasochistic desires, unconscious as we may be of them, but also because we can find in it the opportunity for belonging and for retaining our self-esteem. Because leisure pursuits do help revitalize, rejuvenate, and refresh, they may be not only flight from our daily reverses but also the means for a fresh start.

Stress and Leisure:

Stress is a dynamic state within an organism in response to a demand for adaptation, and since life itself entails constant adaptation, living creatures are always in a state of more or less stress (Wolff and Goodell, 1968).

Stress was originally an engineering term introduced into the social sciences by Hans Selye in 1956. Selye views stress as the "non-specifically induced changes within a biological system". According to Selye, an individual's reaction to stress occurs in three major stages, a process which he summarises as the General Adaptation Syndrome. These three stages are alarm reaction, stage of resistance and stage of exhaustion.

The linkages as psychosocial variables evoke stress responses that may ultimately be more damaging to the organism than the aversive event itself. Psychological stressors may

precede the physical event, last longer, and continue to evoke stress after physical event is past (Baum, Singer and Baum, 1981). According to Lazarus (1966) response to stressors is determined by the degree to which an event is perceived as threatening, harmful, or challenging.

Gross (1970) has identified the following three broad categories of stressors:

- 1) Organisational Careers;
- 2) Tasks; and
- 3) Organisational Structure.

These three stressors are generally grouped under a single title now, namely, organisational stress.

Another source of stress is sometimes referred to as extraorganisational stress (Cooper & Marshall, 1978) ie., the relationship with family and spouse; time, and spillover of stress from one to the other.

Stress is known to have two faces. It can be an individual's worst enemy or his best friend. In its role as an enemy it wears one down in a number of subtle ways and hits at the bodily and mental capacities. As a friend it makes one aware of challenges, progress and development. An optimum level of stress is highly conducive to superior performance.

However, an individual's job can be hazardous to his health. Stress in the work place can give negative fringe benefits one never bargained for.

Level of Stress:

An optimum level of stress is necessary for executive glow up. An individual is like a string instrument. If there is less tension in the string (hypo-stress), the instrument will not produce the required note. If the strings are tensed too much (hyper-stress) then it may break or snap. Thus, an optimum level of tension is to be maintained for good music. Similarly, studies have shown that an optimum stress is needed to produce challenge and a sense of adequacy.

Stress can be functional, contributing to glow up, or dysfunctional, contributing to burnout. The first has been called "eustress" and the second "distress". Eustress is the stress of achievement, triumph, and exhilaration. Distress is the stress of disappointment, inadequacy, defeat and helplessness.

Job burnout refers to a debilitating psychological condition brought about by unrelieved work stress, which results in (Verningle and Spradley, 1981):

1. depleted energy reserves
2. lowered resistance to illness
3. increased dissatisfaction and pessimism
4. increased absenteeism and inefficiency at work

Although there is no single best strategy for helping someone to recover from job burnout, sometimes an effective beginning is to help the person regain control over his or her

leisure time'. According to George Bernard Shaw's aphorism: "Labour is doing what we like". Even reading the best prose or poetry is work for the professional literary critic, as tennis or golf is work for the paid pro. Yet the athlete may read for relaxation, and the man of letters may engage in sports for his change of pace. Fishing, gardening, or almost any other occupation is work when you have to do it for a living, play if you choose to do it for fun.

One should learn the art of changing gears. Changing gears involves shifting from work to something else. One should try to find activities which capture his interest. One should not be too much tied to work, when work becomes an end in itself, it is a burden.

The importance of leisure in the whole picture of sound mental health must ultimately consider the individual in a highly structured, complex society. We have had God - centered, family - centered, state - centered, and profit - centered cultures (Brightwell). What is needed in a society swamped with leisure is the individual - centered (not self-centered) culture if we are to reach the highest state of well-being. It is here that one thinks of hyper-stress and hypo-stress. The first characterised by an over-activation of one's life with high growth orientation and achievement motivation. The second, namely hypo-stress, relates to lack of activity or complete slowing down of pace of life. Both these, when not cared for properly, can damage the mind and the body.

Rustout Stress Syndrome (ROSS):

Researchers have observed a phenomenon which is the opposite of BOSS (Burnout Stress Syndrome). The Rustout Stress Syndrome or ROSS, is indicative of stress under-load. It occurs when there is a gap between what the executive is capable of doing and what he is required to do. Stress underload can arise due to both qualitative and quantitative aspects of work. Clearly a situational appraisal is a prerequisite for countering stress.

Generally, executives complain about hyper-stress but possibly more unwelcome is the situation of hypostress. In fact, many organisations create, hypostress situations by denying the individual legitimate tasks and normal activities with accompanying responsibilities and challenges. Many of us do not plan for a situation of 'normal hypostress' we have to face when we superannuate. Fortunately, some attention has been given in the recent past to deal with the hypostress created by superannuation. A boring job can lead to a rustout. If an individual's work does not use his skills, if it leaves him thinking that "even a chimp could do this", then one may need to 'get involved'.

Since the situation of stress is an of experienced reality, we can suggest several remedial measures to deal with it. All kinds of solutions are offered: taking short naps, listening to classical music expressing your feelings, assessing your treatment of others, checking your living habits, taking

minivacations. The following methods for reducing stress are some of the more frequently suggested ones (Lewis, 1983).

Health Examination:

A clean bill of health from one's doctor can often relieve chronic stress, the physician should be apprised of what's going on. Increasingly, health checks are exploring the relationship between life activities and physical disorders.

Exercise:

Before beginning any exercise programme, one should see a physician for advice on a programme to fit one's needs and abilities. Then one may begin a programme to keep physically fit. The key is to pick an enjoyable activity. Try to avoid competitive sports for exercise as they often create a different kind of stress. Don't trade one stress situation for another. The point of exercise is to improve the mental outlook, not be become frustrated in trying to win.

Holidays, Vacations and Hobbies:

Holidays, vacations and hobbies are all important for the reduction of stress, because like exercise they take one's mind off the job. They provide a rest from mental fatigue by providing a break in routine. Vacations are a good way to get away from a stressful environment. But the office must be left behind; one must enjoy being away. Holidays are also important because we all need more than a two-week break yearly from stress attacks. Weekends should be rest periods from work when

possible. A hobby or some alternative ongoing activity will involve one with something other than work.

Meditation and Relaxation:

An inexpensive technique for alleviating stress is called the relaxation response (Benson, 1974). Since the risk of developing heart attacks and strokes is directly proportional to the level of blood pressure, as blood pressure goes down the risk diminishes. The relaxation response technique helps in lowering blood pressure and raising one's efficiency by following certain instructions.

Biofeedback:

Biofeedback is a method of using mental powers to regulate bodily systems, that were once believed beyond control. It is becoming a useful tool with executives for controlling stress and hypertension and improving performance. Its primary goal is better physical health. In one biofeedback process a subject is connected to an electromyograph (EMG), which records muscle tension. By watching the dial and listening to the click of the EMG, the subject is able to tune in to what his or her body is doing. As clicks increase in speed, muscle tension (stress) the rising. By using the thought processes the subject attempts to regulate the bodily system by bringing anxieties under control.

Since there is no way to avoid stressful situations completely, biofeedback is one technique for reducing anxieties

by concentrating on relaxation. But there are other techniques which many find useful for reducing stress.

Talk:

Sometimes it is helpful just to talk to other people about one's problems. It is important to find someone who can act as a sounding board. The person doesn't really have to offer solutions, just listen as one talks one's way to a solution. This technique is very similar to nondirective counselling. However, some people can create more stress. So one should pick carefully the persons one talks to as a stress-reducing activity. They should be warm, friendly and empathetic.

Taking Action:

Whatever technique is used to reduce stress, the key is to do something. This step may seem too simple to include, but the majority of people only talk about what they ought to do. Very few ever take the actual corrective step.

Methods of Preventing Stress

The distinction between reduction and prevention of stress and conflict is probably arbitrary. In one case we are trying to deal with stress once it is part of our life. In the other case we are trying to keep from creating needless stress. Some suggestions for preventing stress are:

Manage by Anticipation:

The best strategy for preventing stress is to be prepared. All plausible crises should be considered in advance, and response tactics should be prepared for each. Specific options should be devised for potential threats, risks, and opportunities.

Make Better Use of Environmental Audits:

Survey risks and assess the possibilities of exposure if one operates within a high-risk environment. Give attention to threats and consider how to turn them into opportunities.

Develop Personal Skills:

Take whatever steps are necessary to learn how better to face crises. These may include obtaining an advanced degree, training in public speaking or other communication skills, conducting seminars for others etc. Be prepared to deal with the public and still maintain favourable relationships with them.

Plan Things Right All the Time:

Doing everything right that one is capable of doing, and in public view, is not easy. Several aids are needed. For example, one would have to be able to plan one's time. One might need to develop a management-by-objectives philosophy about how to do one's job. One would also need to recognise one's limitations, what parameters one can work within.

Look Inward:

The real key to stress prevention is introspection, a willingness to look inward and to tap the hidden power of one's own creativity and problem solving abilities. An emotionally mature self-concept is helpful in both reducing and preventing stress. It also will help in solving the human relations problems that cause daily stress.

Stressful situations are often in the mind's eye; what is stressful to one may not be stressful to another. A strong self-concept can help people meet most situations without falling apart from tension and pressure.

Epilogue

It is necessary to examine the relationship between leisure, health and stress. We generally presume that stress is a causative factor in health related problem; further, the leisure phenomenon can counter the adverse impact of stress on health. Here, it is prudent to look at the hypo-stress phenomenon and not to confuse it with leisure. The reason for such a caution arises out of the fact that hypostress is quite capable of causing serious health problems for the individual. It is for this reason, that we need to look carefully at the 'leisure-health-stress' linkage.

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