

# CONNECTIONS

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## Office Potlucks

by Sherri Amos

As the end of the year approaches and we all look forward to some well-earned holiday time off, City staff in many departments make plans to mark the occasion with an Office Potluck. Sharing a meal with your peers is a great way to connect on a personal level and some workplace experts believe that getting to know your co-workers as people will improve communication and build trust at work. We spend a significant amount of time at work and it is natural to see our co-workers as part of our community and the office as a place that meets some of our social needs.

### Some Tips to Make your Office Potluck a Success

- One person or small organizing committee should take charge of the event by scheduling, planning, decorating and cleaning up after the meal. Ask for volunteers to help with these tasks and remember that “many hands make light work.”
- Bring something homemade if possible—it doesn’t have to be fancy or expensive and consider making a recipe that is an old family favorite, it is sure to be a hit with your co-workers as well.
- A sign-up sheet will ensure variety on the day of the potluck. For those who don’t want to prepare food, solicit donations of beverages, paper plates, cups, napkins, or cutlery.
- A little pre-planning ensures success. Does your dish need to be kept warm or reheated in the microwave? Do you need to bring a serving utensil?

### POTLUCK RECIPE IDEAS

- ✦ **Slow Cooker Lasagna**, *Williams Sonoma*
- ✦ **Individual Seven-Layer Dips**, *The Girl Who Ate Everything*
- ✦ **Light and Portable: Best Recipes for an Office Potluck**, *kitchn*
- ✦ **Potluck Recipes (check out “The Turducken of Cheese Balls”!)**, *Chowhound*

- Bring a copy of the recipe or list of the ingredients to display with your dish.
- Take the opportunity to network with associates you don’t know as well or catch up with co-workers you don’t see often.
- Incorporate some charitable giving into your festivities by asking attendees to donate a non-perishable food item and ask a volunteer to deliver the items to a local food pantry. A collection of toiletry items could be donated to a homeless shelter.



Hello City Employees!

This can be a busy time of year, and with so many employees now residing in new work environments, we have included some articles in this newsletter that are more useful, fun, and uplifting, like tips for successfully organizing office potlucks, and a beautiful article by Randy Kratz from FEI, our external EAP provider, on kindness and how our personal experiences can have a role in building trust and respect with others.

We also wanted to acknowledge that while this time of year can bring joy, it can also bring stress. Though we do have more opportunities to connect with family, friends, and coworkers, some of us find ourselves also thinking about things like those who we are unable to spend time with, our finances, or the fact that we (or perhaps a loved one) aren’t quite ourselves. Resilience can be built by anticipating and acknowledging struggles and educating yourself and preparing for them, so we included articles on debt management and Seasonal Affective Disorder for this purpose.

We are here if you need us, and wish you peace, safe travels, and much fun as we enter into these seasonal celebrations!



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# Seasonal Affective Disorder



by Hailey Krueger

With the start of winter approaching, many of us are already preparing ourselves mentally and logistically for the changes that come with living in Wisconsin during the winter months. We pull out our winter boots and cold weather attire, consider travel times based on road conditions, and for many of us, we find that we are leaving for work in the dark and traveling home in the dark. While some people thrive in cold weather (I personally am not one of them), for many, the time between late fall and early spring can be particularly challenging.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that comes and goes with seasonal changes, most commonly occurring during the winter months, when exposure to the sun is decreased. It is not less impactful or less important because “it only happens for part of the year” and it is not something you want to “just suffer through until next spring.” Seasonal Affective Disorder is a diagnosable subtype of depression which professionals believe may be impacted by changes in our body’s internal clock—referred to as circadian rhythm, a drop in serotonin levels—a chemical which affects our mood, and disrupted melatonin levels—a hormone involved in sleep and mood.

People with SAD may be feeling irritable, have difficulty concentrating, feeling tired or oversleeping, experiencing appetite changes like craving foods high in carbohydrates, gaining weight, and other depressive symptoms. It’s normal to a degree for us to experience some of these symptoms during transitioning times, but if they are persistent or interfere with your work or personal health and wellness, it may be time to seek out additional support.

The American Psychological Association recommends the following to manage Seasonal Affective Disorder:

- Experience as much daylight as possible.
- Eat healthy.
- Spend time with your friends and family.
- Stay active.
- Seek professional help.

Visit the APA’s website for more information on managing **Seasonal Affective Disorder**.

For those who have recently relocated workspaces, or may have things occurring in their own life outside of work that have presented some challenges, be mindful of these experiences and try not to assume that irritability, oversleeping, and weight gain are “normal” occurrences during the winter or holiday season. If you would like more information about Seasonal Affective Disorder at home or at work, or would like information about local resources for wellness guidance and support, you can contact our internal Employee Assistance Office at 266-6561 or our external EAP provider, FEI, at 800-236-7905.



# LEADERSHIP *Matters*

## Make America (and the Workplace) Kind Again

by Randall Kratz, FEI Senior Account Manager

Recently I took some time away from work to be with my grandmother in her final moments. As usual, one of the first things she asked me was, "Are you being nice to others?" My "grammy" grew up on a small dairy farm in rural Pennsylvania. Some of her greatest gifts were preparing food out of love for us and being genuinely kind and considerate to others. She knew that people who practice acts of kindness create happiness, and those that experience kindness feel more connected to themselves and others.

My grandmother passed away on her 102nd birthday. When I returned to work, my colleagues provided much needed support as I transitioned back into my role. Many of my work family were not only sorry for my loss, but also asked how I was doing, what my grandmother was like and shared their own personal stories of loss. When I went to our CEO to thank him for his kind words to me while away, he responded with, "You're a friend. Why wouldn't I do that?"

So where do these basic human needs fit into a productive work environment? Can leaders and managers do more to foster and encourage kindness and meaningful connection?

Being kind is an innate ability we all possess. It requires us to open up, to show our softer side. It means taking risks in a world where performance, productivity and competition are sometimes more highly valued. Is there room for this type of vulnerability in the workplace? In short, yes!

Brené Brown, author and professor, studies human connection. Her 2010 TED Talk, "The Power of Vulnerability," has been watched more than 26 million times, the highest number of TED Talk views ever. Obviously this concept resonates with many of us.

When you share a personal experience or a story, you make yourself vulnerable. Stories tend to reveal our flaws and mistakes, as well as the challenges that need to be or have been overcome. It shows our humanity despite our differences.

Many leaders are careful about sharing personal information or revealing their struggles at work for fear of judgment or criticism. However, many of us are drawn to the transformative power of vulnerability that sharing personal stories creates. This can help us connect with each other in ways not otherwise possible. It can also improve leadership ratings by increasing the happiness levels of employees throughout the organization.

When we consistently promote values like trust, respect and acceptance, we create a safe place for people to grow and feel fulfilled. People who feel safe are, in turn, more apt to reach out to others in a connected and harmonious way. This human connection improves the social bonds that encourage us to cooperate, rather than compete, with each other. My grandmother understood that such cooperation was critical for farmers living off the land, for example, because those who were kind and worked alongside one another were more likely to survive than those who struggled in conflict and isolation.



As an employee assistance program (EAP) account manager and consultant, I regularly talk with managers about improving the people-management side of the workplace. They often ask for ideas on how to deal with a challenging employee or supervisor. It's very hard, if not impossible, to change certain difficult behaviors, and in the end the only thing we can change is ourselves and how we respond. If we want to see a more respectful, kinder, more connected and happier workplace, we need to be these things ourselves: we need to lead through example.

And let's face it: happy and motivated staff members are at the heart of every well-functioning and successful business.

# Controlling Your Personal Debt



by fei workforce resilience

Debt has become a four-letter word in the United States, and there is good reason to avoid the unnecessary accumulation of debt. However, borrowing money remains easy to do, and people who struggle to manage their budgets may feel helpless when it comes to controlling personal debt. Here is everything you need to know about avoiding debt, paying down your existing debt and managing your finances in the future.

## Preventing the Accumulation of Debt

Millions of Americans carry debt loads that they just cannot handle. The best way to control your personal debt is to avoid running into problems in the first place. However, this is easier said than done. While borrowing regulations are stricter than they once were, it is still relatively easy for the average consumer to rack up tons of debt.

How do you control your debt before it becomes a problem? These tips will help you keep your finances under control.

### ***Set a strict budget.***

Budgeting can be difficult because of the realistic view that it gives you when it comes to household finances. However, people who are successful at controlling debt take the time to budget every expense. Be sure to evaluate your budget at the end of each month to determine whether your budgeted amounts are practical.

### ***Never spend money that you do not have.***

This does not mean that you cannot use credit cards, but you have to have the cash on hand to pay off the amount that you are charging. The only time this piece of advice does not apply is when you are buying a house. A home purchase is considered an investment, so the debt is going toward something.

### ***Cut out the extras.***

Cable service, fancy cell phones and fast food are all unnecessary expenses that can put a strain on your budget. Cut out the extras to avoid taking on debt to pay for these unnecessary products and services.

***Preventing debt accumulation and dealing with overwhelming debt can be difficult tasks to face, but being proactive about controlling your debt is important for your financial future. Use the tips outlined above to get a handle on your debt.***

## Dealing with Existing Debt

What do you do when you are already dealing with debt that you cannot pay? The answer is to avoid ignoring your problem. It is tempting to pretend that debt does not exist, but the calls from creditors are not going to stop. Penalties and fees will be assessed to balances that are already accruing interest, so it is important for you to face this problem.

Fortunately, there are many methods from which to choose when it comes to paying down debt to make it more manageable. Choose the techniques that work best for your lifestyle and spending habits to take control of your debt.

### ***Talk to your creditors.***

Shutting your creditors out keeps them in the dark when you are unable to pay your bills. Imagine how you would feel if a friend stopped talking to you after borrowing money from you. Since no information is being relayed, creditors assume that you are being purposefully irresponsible.

Call your creditors to let them know what is going on. If your income has decreased, explain why this happened. Outline your income and expenses to display the hardship that you are facing. Many creditors are willing to lower your minimum payments temporarily.

### ***Negotiate your debts.***

If you are able to pay a portion of your debts in full, you may be able to negotiate significantly reduced balances with your creditors. Again, it is essential that you contact lenders to discuss this option.

### ***Make drastic adjustments to your budget.***

Even though debts may seem overwhelming, it is possible that you could get a handle on them without having to negotiate payments. Cutting down your budget to the bare necessities will help you pay down your debt. While it seems difficult to do, cutting your budget is a temporary hardship. As long as you are careful to avoid accumulating debt again, you will be able to add some small extras to your budget in the future.



*Thanks for reading,  
we hope you found the information useful!*

**You can reach any of us by calling the  
EAP Office at (608) 266-6561**

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