

CONNECTIONS

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Fill Your Work-Life Jar with What Matters Most: Relationships

By Debra Mashek, Ph.D., **Psychology Today** (Used with the author's permission)

What's at stake if we treat our workplace relationships as an afterthought.

During my tenure as a professor at Harvey Mudd College, one of my favorite courses to teach was Psychology of Close Relationships. I would always save until the last week of class the three lessons I most wanted students to carry forward with them into the real world: (1) relationships take real effort to build and sustain; (2) it's absolutely possible to learn how to do relationships well; and (3) the first step is to make room in your life for your relationships.

I'll connect these ideas to workplace relationships in a moment.

But, first, I want to share the story—derived from one that has been floating around the internet for at least the past 15 years—that I told each semester to make the point about the importance of making room in life for your relationships.

The golf balls in the pickle jar

A professor walks into her classroom and sets a large pickle jar on the table. She proceeds to fill the jar with golf balls. When it is clear that no additional golf balls could possibly fit, she asks the students, "Is this jar full?" The students look a bit perplexed because, obviously, the jar is full. Nevertheless, they humor the professor and answer yes.

The professor then produces from her tote a bag of pebbles. She proceeds to pour the pebbles into the jar. Not surprisingly, the pebbles find plenty of interstitial space among the golf balls. As the pebbles settle, both the professor and the students are amazed by how many actually fit into the jar. As before, she fills the jar to the top. As before, she asks her students, "Is the jar full?" Amid smiles, the students nod yes.

Next, the professor reaches back into her tote and produces a bag of fine sand. (Sidebar: I know from experience that one should use dry sand at this point in the demonstration!) She looks up at the students, gives a wry smile, and proceeds to pour this fine sand into the jar over the golf balls and pebbles. And, of course, the sand finds the interstitial spaces. As the sand reaches the top of the jar, the professor again asks, "Is the jar full?" The students nod.

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Happy New Year City Employees,

We apologize for the delay in announcing that the EAP Connections Newsletter will be moving from monthly to quarterly in 2022. The exciting news is that in place of 8 newsletters this year, we will be offering other formats to share information about mental wellness such as through video, audio, and virtual interactive presentations. We will also be highlighting resources available through FEI, in the community (local and online), and through other City and State initiatives like Well Wisconsin.

On a related note, we have included some tips in this issue on accessing wellness services through your health insurance provider. Many employees don't realize what is available to them through their selected plan and this is especially noteworthy if you have changed plans for 2022. There is a lot of support for you if you are looking for opportunities to increase your physical and mental wellbeing and your EAP can help you navigate this if needed.

So, be well!

~ The EAP Team



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At this point, the professor pulls two cans of beer from her tote, cracks them open, and pours them into the jar. Not surprisingly, the liquid finds plenty of space in this supposedly full jar.

As she takes a breath, the professor surveys the room with warmth and positive regard for her students. She gently places her hands on either side of the jar and says:

“This jar represents your life. The golf balls represent the most important things in your life—your health, your passions, your work, your relationships. Fill your life first with golf balls. Your life will be full. You will be happy.

“Next, fill your life with the other things that matter to you, perhaps attending special events or deepening your learning about a particular subject. Finally, let the other stuff—chores, social media, or finally running the pile of clothes to the donation center—sift into the remaining spaces.

“If you fill your life with sand and pebbles first, there’s simply no way to squeeze in the golf balls. Make room, first, for the big stuff.”

At this point, one student raises her hand and asks, “But what the heck is up with the beer?”

The professor says, “I’m so glad you asked. In the jar of life, there’s always room for a beer with friends.”

The end.

How does this story connect to collaborative relationships at work?

While various versions of this story exist—sometimes involving a mayonnaise jar vs. a pickle jar, ping pong balls vs. golf balls, and coffee, tea, or wine vs. beer—the take-home point is always the same: make room for the important things in your life so they don’t get crowded out by the unimportant stuff.

I haven’t been in the classroom for a couple of years, but I’ve been thinking about this story a lot lately within the context of our work lives. At work, just as in life, we need to make room for the important stuff first.

And here is where my passion for collaboration comes in: Our collaborative workplace relationships matter, and not just because they help us feel connected and engaged at work. These relationships are also critical vehicles for achieving our most ambitious goals. They’re important. They’re golf balls. We need to invest in them.

Yet, we don’t often treat these relationships like the golf balls they are. Rather than putting in the time and effort it takes to build and sustain healthy workplace relationships, we expect those relationships to somehow develop and grow on their own. We treat collaborative relationships—and professional development around how to do those relationships well—as an afterthought, more like the sand in the story. Not surprisingly, in the absence of healthy collaborative relationships, best intentions fizzle, projects crumble, and good people walk.

Like all relationships, collaborations take effort

What I have come to realize in the years since leaving the classroom is that the same takeaways I sought to impart to my students also apply to workplace collaborations: (1) collaborative relationships take real effort to build and sustain; (2) it’s absolutely possible to learn how to do collaborative workplace relationships well; and (3) the first step is to make room in your work life for your collaborative relationships.

Would you like to learn more about how to build collaborative relationships in the workplace? Check out this archived webinar on FEI’s Member Portal: **Interpersonal Relationships: Getting Ahead by Getting Along**

Do you need to set up your account to access the external EAP’s resources? Visit the **FEI services page** on our website for a how-to.



What Happens When We Remember

By Ryan Daley, Jaclyn Ford, Ph.D., and Elizabeth Kensinger, Ph.D., *Psychology Today* (Used with the authors' permission)

Retrieving memories helps us function. Doing so can also change the memories.

We value memory for its ability to transport us back to a prior events and provide us with the opportunity to re-experience the past, vividly and emotionally. Reflecting back on these events can be inherently pleasurable, and this ability serves important functions in our day-to-day lives (Pillemer, 1992).

Memories of our past help us to understand ourselves better. When asked about who we are, or about our strengths and weaknesses, we often think about the obstacles we have encountered and the moments that brought us joy; by knowing what we have been through, we are able to formulate our personal identity. Recalling past events not only helps us know ourselves better, but it can also help us to connect with others. Finding common ground in similar past experiences can instantly create a bond. It is through the sharing of joyous or challenging anecdotes that people begin to trust one another.

Memories can also serve the important function of helping us plan for the future. Sometimes, just remembering the gist of an event can be quite helpful for this function of memory. We might plan to bring a lunch to work because we remember that the cafeteria gets crowded. Or we might remember our appreciation when an old friend wrote to us and therefore decide to write to someone with whom we have lost touch.

Other times, the specifics can be helpful: Being able to clearly remember a particular action may also make it easier to envision doing it again in the future. For example, people who better remember times when they helped others are more likely to engage in similar helping behaviors in the future (Gaesser & Schacter, 2014).

What Happens When We Remember Repeatedly

In all of these ways, remembering the past helps us to interact with the world around us. However, the act of remembering is more than pulling up a record of the past and using the information in the moment. Remembering is an active process that can actually change a memory every time it is brought to mind. Recalling a past event can strengthen the representation of that memory, making it easier to retrieve in the future (Rowland, 2014). This is why memories that we discuss repeatedly often feel easier to recall.

It might seem obvious that remembering something one day will make it easier to remember the next. But less intuitively, retrieving a memory can actually alter its contents, making it slightly different the next time we bring it to mind.

We often talk about memory as re-experiencing a past event, but a memory is not an exact replication of what originally happened. Whenever a memory is brought to mind, it becomes susceptible to changes. New information learned since the original event, whether true or false, can be incorporated into the memory, so that it is later remembered as part of that event (Else et al., 2018). In this way, remembering an event is less like

a rerun of an old show, and more like following a screenplay: There is a plot that stays generally consistent, but the exact dialogue and the way scenes are portrayed may change from one production to the next.

Bugs in the System?

Remembering a particular piece of information not only makes it more vulnerable to change, but also makes it harder to remember other, related information that has not been recalled.

For example, say we have a list of items that we need to pick up on our way home from work: five fruits from the farm stand (apples, oranges, bananas, blueberries, and strawberries), and five items from the pharmacy (tissues, cold medicine, a thermometer, cough drops, and hand sanitizer). On the drive, we hear a commercial for a pie stand, which reminds us that we want to make sure to get apples and blueberries, but we aren't reminded of the other fruits.

When it's time to remember our list, it's easy to see why we would be more likely to remember apples and blueberries compared to any of the other items. However, we are also less likely to remember oranges, bananas, and strawberries compared to any of the pharmacy items. The act of remembering a subset of our fruit list made the unremembered items even harder to remember later (see Anderson, 2003). The same process can happen when remembering details of an event: Remembering some of the details of a particular event can strengthen their memory, but makes other details that were not remembered less likely to be remembered in the future.

It may seem maladaptive to have a memory system in which the memories that we trust so completely are easily and unintentionally altered. However, it is this system that allows us to learn from past events and to see the silver linings of an otherwise negative experience. By reframing a past event with new context that we can grow along with these memories and use them to maintain our personal identity, strengthen our relationships, and direct our future.



How to Stop the Pain

By Polly Campbell, **Psychology Today** (Used with the author's permission)

New strategies offer the promise of pain relief.

The x-ray of my hip looks like a weather pattern. A storm of thunderclouds moving in. The joint is gone, eroded by rheumatoid arthritis.

The pain changes from day to day. Sometimes it is grinding friction. Other times a deep ache. Sometimes it is sharp up through the groin or down into my knee. But it's always present. It's chronic. And it's a part of my life.

I'm not the only one, of course. More than 50 million Americans live with chronic pain, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as a result of lower back injuries, regular migraines, arthritis, cancer, and other illnesses and accidents.

And it isn't just the one with chronic pain who hurts. A single individual living with chronic pain impacts families, workplaces, friendships, and communities.

I work daily to manage the changing nature of my pain, but often that means managing my activity and fatigue too. I'm doing less around the house now. I've stopped volunteering in the community, and I'm experiencing more fatigue that demands rest.

My focus and productivity at work are also taking a beating. It takes me longer to get posts out because concentration wavers. Some days, it's hard to regulate my mood. On a rough pain day, I'm much more impatient and irritable around here. Not fun for any of us to live with.

Yet, most days, I can manage my pain effectively in a way that allows me to live the life I want. Takes effort, for sure, but there are a lot of things that help. And I'm hopeful because new research is identifying other mind-body approaches that will change how we experience pain and maybe ease it altogether.

Pain remedies and research

Scores of studies have shown that **mindful breathing and meditation can ease pain** by focusing attention on internal sensory details rather than the pain response.

Because pain is a process that occurs in both the brain and the body, when we change how the brain is activated, it can change how we hurt.

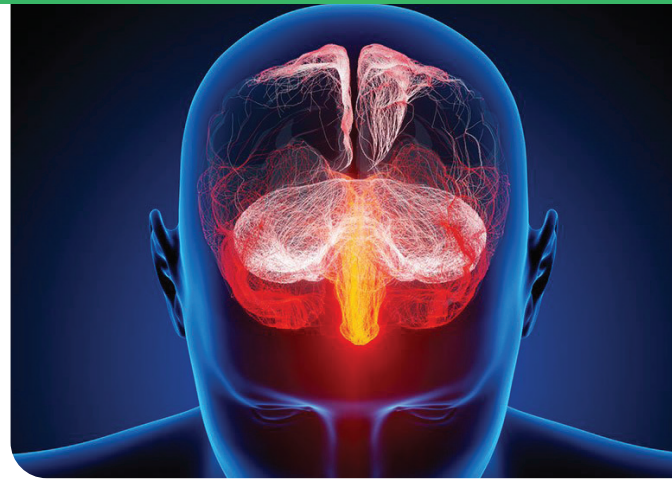
Mindfulness meditation does this by activating the frontal regions of the brain to compete with pain signals, cluttering up the way the body processes pain, causing us to perceive less.

But a new study indicates that a virtual reality experience where the participants watch a pair of virtual 3D lungs breathing also **provides powerful pain relief** in an opposite way by creating an immersive, external experience that engages our other senses and diminishes our perception of pain.

Alexandre DeSilva, who led the research, and the University of Michigan are now looking at ways to provide this virtual reality breathing experience to others through an application and other methods.

Another hopeful pain management approach is being investigated at Lund University in Sweden, where doctors are using **ultra-thin microelectrodes to provide customized pain relief** without drugs and their side effects.

The microelectrodes are implanted to activate the brain's control center without stimulating the nerve cell circuits. Doctors can then select the electrodes individually or in clusters to suit the patient's unique needs.



The pain is blocked by activating the brain's pain control centers and blocking the signals along the pain pathways.

It's early, but the study's author, Matilde Forni, says, "We have achieved an almost total blockade of pain without affecting any other sensory system or motor skill."

Gene therapy may also supply an opioid-free treatment for chronic pain by temporarily repressing the gene that senses pain. It worked in mice and provided long-term pain relief without numbness or opioids, according to the researchers at the University of California San Diego who developed the approach.

With these and other emerging therapies, those of us living with chronic pain have reason to be hopeful.

Ease pain in the brain


While we can treat the physical triggers of pain with medication, acupuncture, and other medical and naturopathic practices and interventions, working with our thoughts and beliefs about our pain experience is also a powerful way to manage.

When we ruminate about our pain and begin catastrophizing by thinking in absolute terms and dwelling on how bad it is and how much worse it's going to get, we do heighten our sensitivity to pain. Stress and anxiety also make our pain worse.

Instead, catch your catastrophizing thoughts and reframe them. Notice your thoughts, relax your body through a deep breathing exercise, meditation, or visualization, and replace your debilitating thoughts with something more manageable and true, such as, "Pain changes; it won't always be like this."

Or try something more direct to detach from the moment, such as, "What am I thinking right now? What ideas were going through my head?"

When we disrupt the negative thought pattern, we disrupt the mental triggers that can cause physical pain to flare.



**EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
TRAUMA-INFORMED
CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Does it feel like everyone is on edge lately? Where people are angry or lashing out? Do you need additional skills to better handle this? Then join us in learning about Trauma-Informed Customer Service, which is all about how we can provide customer service to people who have had bad things happen in their lives. As humans, we tend to internalize our negative experiences and the stress that comes with those. An example is the communal trauma that we all have been experiencing with the pandemic. The stress can accumulate and make us feel anxious or angry, and make it easy to lash out at others. Come learn about how to reframe these situations and acquire some techniques to better handle challenging customers.

- » Wednesday, February 23, 2022, 9:00-10:30AM
- » Wednesday, April 6, 2022, 10:00-11:30AM



Registration required.
Questions? Call the EAP Office at (608) 266-6561.



Wellness options offered to City of Madison employees

Well Wisconsin, administered by WebMD, is the uniform wellness incentive available to employees and their spouses currently enrolled in the Wisconsin Public Employers Group Health Insurance Program. City of Madison employees and spouses of City of Madison employees who are enrolled in the City's group health insurance program are each eligible for a \$150 wellness incentive upon completion of a health risk assessment, health screening, and well-being activity.

Depending on your plan, you may have access to additional incentives or resources. Your insurance provider's web site may offer additional wellness services but you may need to call to confirm eligibility:

- www.deancare.com/wellness
- www.ghcscw.com/wellness/state-of-wi-employee-wellness-initiative
- www.uwhealth.org/services/center-for-wellness



IT TAKES A VILLAGE

How Sex Offenders Groom Their Victims

By Kelli Palfy, Ph.D., **Psychology Today** (Used with the author's permission)

Sexual offenders are scary and savvy, but red flags can be detected.

Most people recognize that boys and men are victims of sexual abuse. But since you don't know many of these victims yourself, you may be wondering where those crimes are being committed. To understand male sex abuse, it's helpful to understand the common grooming techniques offenders use.

Grooming techniques are the deliberate, carefully orchestrated acts and gestures offenders engage in. The acts are all legal and not harmful in themselves, but later recognized as offenders' preparation process, designed to win the affection, trust, and loyalty of potential victims and their parents. They are designed to seduce and prepare potential victims for sexual relations,[1] and then leave those victims confused about what happened.

The process begins when the predator goes in search of a target. They will visit the places children go: schools, malls, sporting events, and parks, etc., and study the latest cultural trends and media sites to learn about their victims' likely interests so they can create access points. Perpetrators may become very attentive, not only to the child's needs, but also to the parents' needs in order to gain their trust.[2] They often befriend the parents and are deceptively transparent about their intentions to befriend their children, hoping to mislead the parent into feeling at ease.

Many offenders go to extreme measures, including establishing a career or hobby within an educational institution or volunteer organization. Others befriend or even marry a single parent to gain access to unguarded children. Offenders may remain non-sexual with targets for long periods of time while waiting for them to mature to their age of preference.

Offenders are thought to have a radar for children in disadvantaged situations.[3] Vulnerable children include those who haven't yet learned that some people can't be trusted, those with low self-esteem, and those in need of friends. Rebellious teens and those isolated by their peers, or those having problems with their parent(s), may be easy targets for offenders. Offenders will win a target's affection by using false self-disclosures and false empathy. They may lie and tell them they too went through the same things when they were young. [4] Offenders often fake a common background or interest and pay special attention to their potential victim, preying on weakness and vulnerability the same way predators do in the wild.[5] They watch for a weak individual, separate them from the group, then attack. Offenders often work to separate a child by taking that target away from their home on educational or recreational outings.[6]

In males, sexual abuse often begins with the gradual introduction of touch. They may first tickle or poke younger children. In older children, first physical contact is often through the use of a trusted friend. Offenders will encourage the two friends to play fight, teach them how to subdue others, engage in rough play, and encourage them to remove their shirts. Offenders may or may not join in once they are fully engaged. First physical contact between predator and victim is often non-sexual, designed to desensitize the victim by getting them used to being touched[7].

Offenders will introduce an expectation of secrecy into their process, often by introducing them to other masculine principles, such as the use of coarse language which the boy is rewarded for using. This secrecy binds the victim to his predator (and may be accompanied by threats if the offender fears being exposed). They may offer candy to young children, allow older children and teens to play prohibited video games, or to use alcohol, tobacco, or other illicit drugs. Offenders will tell them not to tell their parents and indicate that they will get them both in trouble if they do. These acts help the offender to establish the risk of being reported on, reasoning that it is better to be found out for offering a child alcohol than for engaging in sexual acts.



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Progressively, offenders often work toward a situation in which their target has to change his clothes, spend the night, or both[8]. Here they may be allowed to engage in further mature activities (like driving) or make adult decisions.

Offenders may inquire about their target's present knowledge of sex and/or introduce them to pornography, often leaving it around for easy detection.[9] The pornography may depict other children engaged in sexual acts and is designed to establish interest and provoke arousal, [10] while lessening resistance toward engaging in such acts themselves. In time, the touch progresses into more overt sexual touching — the predator's ultimate goal. They may offer to teach victims to masturbate, verbalizing that they are old enough, and tell them it's what all grown men do. The offender may offer to assist them to 'masturbate properly' or offer to perform oral sex on them. By the time the victim realizes they have been sexually assaulted, they are confused, since they previously liked their offender. Many victims fear reporting lest they get in trouble or be blamed for their own participation.

Although offenders often target disadvantaged children, the reality is that any child may be abused.[11] Predators target children in healthy families, too. Offenders will work hard to find and fill any voids, often moving mountains to gain access to their victims. Any child who feels lonely, unloved, or unpopular will naturally gravitate toward someone who gives them attention, affection, and praise.[12]

Please see the [online article](#) for references.

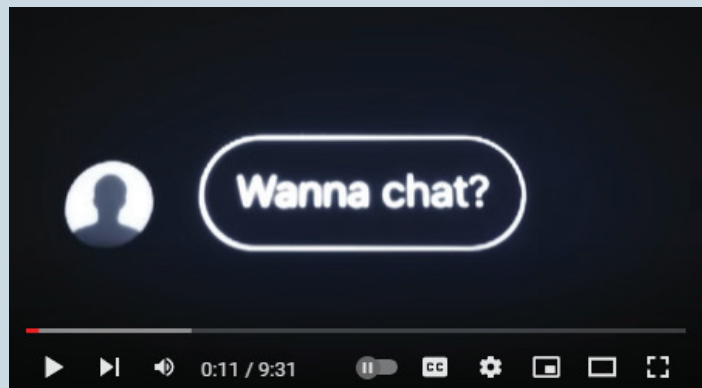
Tips for Raising Resilient Kids

Tip #10 – Have open communication and be curious about your child's world.

As parents we tend to be so busy with our endless tasks that at times we may dismiss comments that our children make, however it is important to be curious with your child. Ask follow up questions to learn more about what your child is saying and why. Make time to engage in activities that they like and to learn about how they like to entertain themselves and use technology.

We are raising children in an unprecedented world led by technology, where through an array of different platforms our children have access to anyone in the world and vice versa. It is almost impossible to keep up with all of the new ways of communicating and interacting. The reality is that every platform that has an interactive component that a child uses, is also a platform that predators use to prey on children. These are not only our typical social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat but also apps that serve other entertainment purposes such as TikTok or gaming apps (that allow for interaction).

To learn a little bit more about the dangers of social media check out this [video](#) produced by Bark. While it is disturbing to watch, it is so important for parents to be aware of how sexual predators operate. **Viewer discretion is advised!**



Social Media Dangers Exposed by Mom Posing as 11-Year-Old

Accessing services through your current health insurance provider

Insurance and provider change:

For 2022 some of you may have chosen to switch insurance providers. When this is the case, in order to avoid out of pocket expenses, it is important to confirm that your current providers are within network for your new insurance carrier. This may include your primary care doctor, mental health provider, psychiatrist, etc. You can check for this by calling the customer/member service number on the back of your insurance card or visiting your insurance carrier's website.

For accessing MH services on your own:

When trying to connect to mental health services, you can do this on your own by calling the customer/member service number on the back of your insurance card. Once connected to a representative, you may ask for the contact information for in-network mental health providers that may be taking new clients. You may also have additional requests to consider like: gender, languages offered, specialty areas of treatment, treatment modalities, etc. Your carrier should be able to offer a few options. Once you have that information, some providers may offer a free 15 minute consultation to learn more about them and assess whether they are a good fit for you and your needs or not. Currently, most insurance carriers are not requiring a prior authorization or referral but in the case that they were, you could request one through your primary care provider. Finally, if you would find it easier to receive some support while navigating this process, EAP is always willing to help!

New FEI Member Portal

The City of Madison's external EAP provider, FEI Workforce Resilience, has recently joined forces with AllOne Health and is pleased to announce greater access and expanded services:

- You can access our external EAP three different ways—from their toll-free number, their new **online member portal** or the mobile app.
- You also have access to three additional services: Medical Advocacy, Life Coaching and Personal Assistant. Learn more about these services under the My Benefits tab after you **create your account**.

If you have questions about accessing the City's external EAP, there is more information on **our website**. You can also call 266-6561 to speak with internal EAP staff or 1-800-236-7905 to reach FEI directly.

Please share this information with your family members!

An eligible family member includes your immediate family members, meaning your spouse or non-marital partner, as well as children who are dependent on you for support.

Resources available on the FEI Member Portal

FEI's new member portal offers articles, webinars, videos, and tips on a variety of topics that you can access as part of your EAP benefit. One of the features we would like to highlight is called **Soft Skills Courses** and could be helpful in brushing up on interpersonal skills as we transition back to the workplace. Each course includes a short video, course notes, and a quiz.

We would also like to point out that FEI's February Webinar is **"The Dynamics of Healthy Relationships"** and is scheduled for Wednesday, February 9th at 12:30pm CT.



*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**

**External Available 24/7:
FEI Workforce Resilience (800) 236-7905**

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