Ascension

FrontLine

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Appreciate Risk of Distractions to Prevent Accidents

You've heard it before: It only takes a second of distraction for an accident to happen. So why is it hard to ignore them, even when performing a dangerous task? One reason is the "normalcy bias"—our tendency to assume all will remain well because nothing bad has happened before. Hence, we engage in distracting activities while driving. You might also tolerate distractions because you know your job too well. For example, if more widgets can be produced with the safety catch off, why not work without it, since you still have 10 fingers and nothing bad has happened—yet? Grasp this idea: Familiarity allows you to operate on autopilot, making distractions harder to notice. And grasp this: Start treating distractions as the key safety hazard. Create a habit of consciously asking yourself, "Where is my attention right now?" Triggers for asking this question include rushing, accepting interruptions, experiencing fatigue, engaging in conversations, using a phone, or experiencing emotional preoccupation.

Learn more: ascelibrary.org/doi/abs/10.1061/(ASCE)CO.1943-7862.0001459

Indoor Gardening for Nutrition and Managing Stress

Tending indoor plants has been shown to lower stress and improve mood because of the hands-on nature of gardening, along with the positive distraction, focus, and satisfaction of watching things grow. Other benefits include positive self-talk from success, goal-directed activity with the reward of eating the results of one's efforts. That's a lot of bennies! Even in the fall and winter, you can easily make gardening part of your stress management strategy. You don't need a garden outside. You only need a jar and water to get started with over a dozen different vegetables and herbs.

Learn more: youtube.com/watch?v=Wv4fnLtw6AM

Five Steps to Help Prevent Suicide

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. Here's what the National Institute of Mental Health wants you to know. If someone may be thinking about suicide, remember five action steps. 1) Ask: "Are you thinking about suicide?" Asking directly does not increase suicidal thoughts or behavior. 2) Be there: Listen without judgment. Talking openly about suicide may help reduce suicidal thoughts. 3) Help keep them safe: Ask whether they have a plan and help reduce access to lethal means. 4) Help them connect: Encourage contact with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, a mental health professional, a trusted family member, a friend, a spiritual advisor, or your EAP. 5) Follow up: Stay in touch after the crisis. Ongoing contact can make an important difference. Most important, don't let fear of saying the wrong thing prevent you from reaching out.

Learn more: nimh.nih.gov [search "five action steps suicide"]

Manage Stress to Reduce Risk of Flu and Colds

Managing stress deserves a place in your strategy for avoiding flu and cold viruses. When stress is chronic, high cortisol suppresses immune cell production, including white blood cells, several types of which are your frontline defenders against viral infections. Do you associate stress with emotional symptoms like anxiety, irritability, and feeling overwhelmed? Many people believe that if they aren't experiencing these states, then stress isn't affecting their immune system. This is a myth. Stress physiology, cortisol elevation, and immune suppression happen at the cellular level. Talk with your doctor or medical advisor to determine which flu vaccine best fits your age, health history, and risk factors. Many types are now available.

Learn more: www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM199108293250903

Building Your **Workplace Reputation**

What price can be put on a highly respected workplace reputation? It's safe to say it's invaluable. A valued reputation is not derived from positive personality traits or being likeable. It's done with intentionality. Here are five ways to grow your reputation as a valued worker. 1) Do what you say you will do. When people know they can count on you, trust develops naturally. It takes only three or four positive experiences, but one failure to follow through can be a significant setback. 2) Acknowledge people when they interact with you. Don't leave them hanging. Respond quickly or let them know when you can respond. The analogy is sitting in a restaurant with a server not acknowledging your presence. 3) Don't hold on to information. Stay aware of others' needs, and if you can solve a problem or have information that will make someone's life easier, step in. It requires practice, self-awareness, and a conscious choice to pause before reacting. How you respond under pressure is modeled by others, making it an important reputation builder. 4) Pause before reacting. It requires practice, self-awareness, and a conscious choice. How you respond under pressure is modeled by others, making it an important reputation builder. 5) Practice consistency. One great performance isn't likely to cement your reputation. Rather, it's the small, consistent efforts that do it. Think of your reputation as a tangible asset, and with the tips above, experience the payoffs for your career.

Managing the September **Family Calendar Explosion**

September is an explosive month, with abrupt changes for many families. Are you facing school schedules, sports, homework, childcare, transportation, medical appointments, work responsibilities, and household chores vying for attention? Consider these tips to reduce tension in September. 1) Put every family and work commitment on one calendar in a central location. This helps stop everyone asking one person what is happening, where they need to be, and who is driving. 2) Block small amounts of unscheduled time into each week. A calendar packed from morning to night leaves no room for the unexpected. 3) Plan personal downtime—even 15 minutes can be rejuvenating. Make it completely free of tasks. Use this time to rest, read, take a walk, enjoy a hobby, or meditate. 4) Learn to delegate and manage stress by visiting your EAP or asking for resources. If you're a mom, it might interest you to know that the Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey by the Gender Equity Policy Institute reports that mothers spend more than double the time fathers do on domestic labor. Learn more: thegepi.org/free-time-gender-gap/

Managing Your New **Employee Fears**

If you're a new hire, you likely have a few normal fears: making mistakes, appearing unqualified, asking the wrong questions, or not measuring up. Most employers have one overriding goal—your success—so relax. New employee mistakes happen, and you're likely more prepared than you think. Trying too hard to prove what you know can make you come across as overly ambitious, lacking self-awareness, or rushing your integration. Here's what counts: your ability to communicate, engage with others, take initiative, learn, contribute, and demonstrate growth. This mattered when you got hired. Thoughtful questions—ones that show you're listening and engaged—will make a more powerful impact than showing what you know. So during your first few weeks, count on making a few mistakes. Learn quickly from them, and don't let one awkward moment feel like a foreshadowing of your future with your new employer.

Concerned About That **After-Work Drink?**

"I'm just unwinding." "It takes the edge off." For some, having an after-work drink may begin as an occasional way to relax, but then it becomes routine. When should you be concerned? Those recovering from an alcohol use disorder (AUD)—and who are therefore abstinent from alcohol and mood-altering substances—have some advice: Notice when *wanting* that drink becomes *missing* it—and eventually feeling its absence when you don't have it. No, you're not necessarily in withdrawal, but your nervous system may be growing accustomed to alcohol's presence. This is called nervous system adaptation. It signals tolerance of ethanol, typically a prerequisite for AUD, a potentially chronic disease. Don't dismiss that small voice of concern. An EAP evaluation is confidential and quick, and you'll know what to do next if there's concern. This early intervention can interrupt progression of a serious problem that can become more difficult to treat. Learn more: "Under the Influence," James R. Milam, PhD

Information in FrontLine is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health or legal professional. For further help, questions, or referral to community resources for specific problems or personal concerns, contact a qualified professional. Add "http://" to source links to follow. Link titles are always case sensitive.