Enjoying your Work: Lessons Learned from a Six-Month-Old Baby

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Alternative Titles

- Building and Retaining a Motivated Extension Work Force
- Beatings (think “reports”) will continue until Morale Improves
- This is what happens when you speak up on a conference call with Regional Director Nathan...
Experiential Education

• 4-H Slogan, “Learn By Doing”

• In anticipation of this presentation, my wife and I decided to have a baby

• And I have pictures...
Tristan!!
Lesson #1, If Baby ain’t Happy, Ain’t nobody Happy!
Pop Quiz #1

- The group of extension professionals experiencing the greatest burnout is:
  1. Agriculture/Natural Resource Agents
  2. 4-H Youth Development Agents
  3. Family & Consumer Agents
  4. Community Development Agents
  5. Extension Administration
Lesson #1, If Baby ain’t Happy, Ain’t nobody Happy!

- There is concern by more experienced agents about burnout by newer agents and the high turnover rate among county faculty, especially newer ones.

Dennis Lamm, personal communication, AGRI 546, Principles of Extension Term Paper Summary, Fall, 2007
Research supports this

- Igodan & Newcomb (1986) studied 241 extension agents in Ohio, and reported that as a group, 4-H agents experienced the most burnout, followed by young agents and single agents. The majority of agents experienced a low level of burnout.

What is Burnout?

• Burnout: to deplete oneself. To exhaust one’s physical and mental resources.
• ...burnout is a process that begins with excessive and prolonged levels of job stress. This stress produces strain in the worker (tension, irritability and fatigue).
• Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do “people work” of some kind.

Symptoms of Burnout

- Low job satisfaction/performance
- Physical exhaustion/fatigue
- Rigidity to change/loss of flexibility
- Decreased communication/withdrawal
- Physical symptoms
- Apathy/loss of concern
- Cynicism
- Emotional Exhaustion

Avoiding Burnout in Extension

• The ability to cope with stress has been shown to be the key to avoiding burnout.
• Experienced agents likely have developed more strategies to cope with stresses.
• Assisting new agents (mentoring or supervising) with development of coping skills may be overlooked in their professional development.
Coping Strategies

- Develop a realistic picture of yourself—know what you’re feeling and why.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Recognize the symptoms of stress and burnout.
- Ask for help when it’s needed.
- Develop a structural and personal support system.
- Retain hope.
- Develop a detached concern for recipients of your efforts.

Coping Strategies (cont.)

• Maintain an active personal social life outside of work.
• Take time-outs when you need them.
• Maintain a regimen of proper nutrition and physical exercise.
• Develop a sense of organizational involvement.
• Be willing to accept counseling when needed.
• Develop self-therapies such as meditation, biofeedback, or relaxation response.
• Accentuate the positive.

CSU Extension Opportunities

• Professional Scheduling policy – Make agents aware and use it ourselves!!
• Fringe Benefits offered by CSU.  
  - Employee Assistance Program  
  - Health/Dental insurance, HSA, retirement, etc.  
  - Annual and Sick Leave  
• Professional Associations – Professional Development/Networking/Recognition
Pop Quiz #2

• The group of extension professionals experiencing the second-greatest burnout is:

1. Agriculture/Natural Resource Agents
2. 4-H Youth Development Agents
3. Family & Consumer Agents
4. Community Development Agents
5. Extension Administration
Lesson #2, Babies Love to Smile!
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- Employees who enjoy their work are fun to be around and are productive.
- Smiles are infectious!
- Creating environment for happy babies helps to bring out more smiles!
Creating Environment

- “Every company needs a ‘signature experience’ that sets it apart. By explicitly communicating what makes your firm unique, you can dramatically improve employee engagement and performance.”

Signature Experiences

• Looking at the Six Roles of Work, what are our organizational strengths and what are your individual office's strengths?

• How would you communicate your “Signature Experience” to a potential hire?
CSU Extension CD's

• Opportunity to Make a Difference in Other's Lives
• Rewarding Programming Areas
• Flexibility & Variety in Work
Lesson #3 - Babies love to learn new things!
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• While routines are comfortable, new experiences are important.
• Comfortable and supported babies are more receptive to new experiences
• Potential benefits can make change more palatable (rice cereal to squash)
Learning/
Trying New Things

- Professional Development Programs
- Work Team Participation
- Entrepreneurial Opportunities (grants, projects, etc.)
- Networking within Extension and within local Communities.
- Other opportunities
Lesson #4 - It's hard to change when a “change” is needed!
Lesson #4 - It’s hard to change when a “change” is needed!

- Agents are not effective if their life is not balanced.
- “Balancing work and family effectively is a continuous struggle for many Cooperative Extension faculty.”

Finding Balance

- Encourage employees to utilize techniques to balance work/private time.
- 1981 ECOP task force, “Extension organizational managers need to critically examine policies and practices in relation to their effects upon the family life of Extension employees.” (in Fetsch & Kennington, 1997).
Colorado Study

• In 1988, Fetsch & Kennington determined that the major differences in stress, depression and life satisfaction were due to length of service and marital status...newer, single agents expressed lower life satisfaction and higher stresses.
Western Region Study, 1993

- Focused on Job Satisfaction; Identified strategies for being successful agents
- 301 County-based extension faculty
- Looked at job satisfaction, attitudes towards colleagues, attitudes towards CES as organization

Findings

• “Moderately satisfied” with their jobs, their colleagues, and with CES
• Satisfied with Salary/benefits (enough to live comfortably on)
• Authority to run programs to meet clientele needs
• Liked by supervisors

Findings (cont.)

- Opportunity for growth (within job and organization)
- CES as an organization
- Helpful colleagues

Interesting Finding

• Satisfaction with CES decreased with increasing number of children living at home
• Satisfaction with CES increased with fewer program area responsibilities

Pop Quiz #3

- What is the estimated cost of employee attrition?
  1. $12,500
  2. $25,000
  3. $40,000
  4. $55,000
  5. Greater than $60,000
So Why do we Care?

• High cost of Staff Turnover
  - Ohio State University estimates the costs of replacing an agent at $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the salary of the leaving agent...
  - Starting salary with Masters Degree and no experience in Colorado is $37,500
  - Estimated $56,250 cost of replacement (includes direct costs and loss of productivity)

So Why do we Care?

• Loss of program continuity
• Loss of talent
• Potential burnout on remaining staff/increased stress levels
• Loss of credibility with constituents?

Summary

• The benefits gained by investing in Extension's current employees may ultimately enhance Extension's ability to fulfill its mission as the educational outreach branch of the land-grant university.

Selected references...

Thank you!!!