

# CAREER HEALTH

## How to Tackle Annoying Employee Habits & Issues

By Susan Heathfield

Have you ever worked along side an employee who had poor personal hygiene, foul smelling clothes or breath, or an annoying personal habit like making clicking noises? Or worse, the employee drinks heavily in the evening and then exudes the smell of alcohol, often mixed with the equally fetid smell of coffee and cigarettes, all day at work?

Or, worst on the list of most challenging issues, the employee's breath and pores exude a spicy aroma that makes you ill; the employee's clothes are clean, but he or she appears to bathe infrequently, and you're positive that saying anything would be culturally insensitive. Welcome to the workplace situations from hell.

Start by reading How to Hold a Difficult Conversation for some initial insight into these challenging discussions. Then, integrate these new tips about holding difficult conversations into your feedback approach.

### More Tips for Holding Difficult Conversations

- Start with a soft approach to set the employee at ease, but don't beat around the bush. The employee's level of anxiety is already sky high and making more small talk while he waits for the bad news to emerge, is cruel. Once you've told him that you want to discuss a difficult topic, move right in to the topic of your difficult conversation.

- Tell the employee directly what the problem is as you perceive it. If you talk around the issue or soften the impact of the issue too much, the employee may never get that the problem is serious. If you reference the problem as "some of our employees do the following," the employee may never understand that you mean him.

- Whenever possible, attach the feedback to a business issue. This is not a personal vendetta; the difficult conversation has a direct business purpose. Perhaps other employees don't want to participate on his team, and you've noticed the lack of volunteers. Perhaps his appearance is affecting the perception of customers about the quality of the organization's products. Maybe, an irritating mannerism has caused a customer to request a different sales rep. Make the business purpose of the conversation clear.

- You also need to let the employee know that not only is the behavior affecting the business and the employee's coworkers, it is affecting the employee's career. Express directly the impact you believe the behavior is having on the employee's potential

promotions, raises, career opportunities, and relationships in the workplace.

- I receive frequent emails asking me if a training solution is appropriate in these instances. The managers who write suggest that they will provide a grooming and professionalism seminar for all employees to attend. The employee with the problem will get the message via the training. It isn't going to happen. The employee with the problem will not get that you mean him and you will have subjected others to training they didn't need.

- Be sensitive to the fact that different cultures have different norms and standards for appearance, bathing, and dress. I'd probably leave this discussion to the employee's manager, but your workplace is justified in asking employees to embrace the cultural standards of the workplace in which the employee is working. This is especially true if nonconformance to the standard is interfering with the harmony and productivity of your workplace.

- Be sensitive to the difference in cooking and eating traditions, too. A woman confided to me recently that her fellow students had laughed at her and made fun of her because she always smelled like curry and garlic and other pungent spices. As a working adult, she has toned down the amount of spice in her cooking, but she was injured by the thoughtlessness for years. Heck, my own father used to regularly complain that I smelled like garlic, and he didn't mean it as a compliment; he was not fond of garlic, and I am.

- If an employee has repeatedly tried to correct a hygiene issue such as bad breath, and is not making progress, suggest that the employee see a physician to determine if an underlying medical condition might be causing the problem. Your thoughtfulness could save an employee's life.

- Finally, if you are the employee's supervisor, you owe it to the employee to hold the difficult conversation. Especially, if other employees have complained to you, understand that if you don't hold the difficult conversation, the employee's coworkers will. And, they may not hold the conversation effectively with the goal of minimizing embarrassment and discomfort.

Care enough about the employee and your productive, harmonious workplace to hold the difficult conversation.

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## 7 Mind Blowing Benefits of Exercise

Continued from front page

### It builds self-esteem and improves body image.

You don't need to radically change your body shape to get a confidence surge from exercise. Studies suggest that simply seeing fitness improvements, like running a faster mile or lifting more weight than before, can improve your self-esteem and body image.

### It leaves you feeling euphoric.

Yes, that "runner's high" really does exist if you're willing to shift into high-intensity mode. Ratey recommends sprint bursts through interval training. Run, bike, or swim as fast as you can for 30 to 40 seconds and then reduce your speed to a gentle pace for five minutes before sprinting again. Repeat four times for a total of five sprints. "You'll feel really sparkly for the rest of the day," he says.

### It keeps the brain fit.

Even mild activity like a leisurely walk can help keep your brain fit and active, fending off memory loss and keeping skills like vocabulary retrieval strong. In a 2011 study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, Canadian researchers analyzed the energy expenditure and cognitive functioning of elderly adults over the course of two to five years. Most of the participants did not work out; their activities revolved around short walks, cooking, gardening, and cleaning. Still, compared with their sedentary peers, the most active participants scored significantly better on tests of cognitive function, and they showed the least amount of cognitive decline. By the study's end, roughly 90 percent of them could think and remember just as well as they could when the study began.

### It may keep Alzheimer's at bay.

The Alzheimer's Research Center touts exercise as one of the best weapons against the disease. Exercise appears to protect the hippocampus, which governs memory and spatial navigation, and is one of the first brain regions to succumb to Alzheimer's-related damage. A recent study published in the Archives of Neurology suggests that a daily walk or jog could lower the risk of Alzheimer's—or blunt its impact once it has begun. In 2000, Dutch researchers found that inactive men who were genetically prone to Alzheimer's were four times more likely to develop the disease than those who carried the trait but worked out regularly.

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**"If you don't design your own life plan, chances are you'll fall into someone else's plan."**

**-Jim Rohn**

# VALUES - BASED QUALITY OF LIFE™ Newsletter

Because Making Smart Choices About Your Money Impacts The Quality of Your Life

Over the years, we have found that there are elements of your life that are more important than money.

These elements - Physical Health, Relationship Health, Inner Health and Career Health - cannot be delegated.

We hope that you find these articles to be of value in improving the quality of your life.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

### 7 Mind-Blowing Benefits of Exercise

By Deborah Kotz & Angela Haupt

Think exercise is all about toned abs and weight loss? It also makes you happier and smarter. Maybe you exercise to tone your thighs, build your biceps, or flatten your belly. Or maybe you work out to ward off the big killers like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. But how about sweating to improve your mind? "Exercise is the single best thing you can do for your brain in terms of mood, memory, and learning," says Harvard Medical School psychiatrist John Ratey, author of the book, Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain. "Even 10 minutes of activity changes your brain." If you need a little extra incentive to lace up those sneakers, here are five ways that exercise can boost your brainpower.

### It reverses the detrimental effects of stress.

Jumping on the treadmill or cross trainer for 30 minutes can blow off tension by increasing levels of "soothing" brain chemicals like serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. What's fascinating, though, is that exercise may actually work on a cellular level to reverse stress's toll on our aging process, according to a 2010 study from the University of California—San Francisco. The researchers found that stressed-out women who exercised vigorously for an average of 45 minutes over a three-day period had cells that showed fewer signs of aging compared to women who were stressed and inactive. Working out also helps keep us from ruminating "by altering blood flow to those areas in the brain involved in triggering us to relive these stressful thoughts again and again," says study coauthor Elissa Epel, an associate professor of psychiatry at UCSF

### It lifts depression.

Research suggests that burning off 350 calories three times a week through sustained, sweat-inducing activity can reduce symptoms of depression about as effectively as antidepressants. That may be because exercise appears to stimulate the growth of neurons in certain brain regions damaged by depression. What's more, animal studies have found that getting active boosts the production of brain molecules that improve connections between nerve cells, thereby acting as a natural antidepressant. And a 2010 study found that three sessions of yoga per week boosted participants' levels of the brain chemical GABA, which typically translates into improved mood and decreased anxiety. Yoga can be used to complement—not substitute—drug treatment for depression, the researchers said.

### It improves learning.

Exercise increases the level of brain chemicals called growth factors, which help make new brain cells and establish new connections between brain cells to help us learn. Interestingly, complicated activities, like playing tennis or taking a dance class, provide the biggest brain boost. "You're challenging your brain even more when you have to think about coordination," explains Ratey. "Like muscles, you have to stress your brain cells to get them to grow." Complicated activities also improve our capacity to learn by enhancing our attention and concentration skills, according to German researchers who found that high school students scored better on high-attention tasks after doing 10 minutes of a complicated fitness routine compared to 10 minutes of regular activity. (Those who hadn't exercised at all scored the worst.)

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# RELATIONSHIP HEALTH

## 5 Communication Pitfalls and Pointers for Couples

By Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S.

Communication is the bedrock of relationships. But when two people with different backgrounds, perspectives and concerns get together, there are many things that can go wrong along the way.

Susan Heitler, Ph.D, a Denver-based clinical psychologist who works with couples and authored the book *The Power of Two: Secrets of a Strong & Loving Marriage*, shares five common communication pitfalls and practical ways to overcome them.

### 1. Pitfall: Not knowing the rules.

Constructive communication has various principles, some of which you or your partner might not know naturally. Or you might have different expectations and totally different communication styles.

For instance, your childhood has a lot to do with how you communicate. "If you grew up in a family where discussion meant debate, you'll talk very differently than if you grew up in a family where discussion meant sharing perspectives and building new ideas together," Heitler says.

Also, some people don't realize that when they're communicating, they might be doing something that's hurtful to their partner. Hurtful behaviors include interpreting, criticism and name-calling, Heitler says.

Interpreting can look like this, according to Heitler: While the wife is washing the dishes and the husband is sitting on the couch reading a book, she assumes that he thinks dishes are a woman's job and that there's no way that he'd join her let alone be willing to take dishes on as his responsibility. "Her interpretation blocks her from asking to find out how in fact he would feel about shifting their after-dinner routines," Heitler says.

When it comes to criticism, a wife who feels she's not being listened to might say, "When I had problems with my co-workers, you blew me off." Criticism can easily lead to name-calling, Heitler says. The spouse might—in her mind or out loud—call her husband selfish. Such conversations can then escalate into a blowout.

**Pointer:** Instead of interpreting, ask your partner, "How come you're reading while I'm washing the dishes?" Heitler says. The answer might be as simple as the husband getting so engrossed in the book that he didn't even know that she was doing the dishes.

Instead of criticizing your partner, discuss your concerns. If you feel like your partner isn't listening to you, ask about their reaction. "What did you

think about what I said?" If they say that they'd rather not talk about it, you can inquire why.

### 2. Pitfall: Aiming for compromise.

You might be surprised to learn that looking for compromise is a pitfall, but compromise produces two losers. As Heitler says, compromise is a "lose-lose solution" for the couple that "leaves both partners feeling compromised." A win-win solution, by contrast, occurs when her-way meets his-way and creates an our-way, she says.

**Pointer:** The key is to talk about the specifics of your and your partner's underlying concerns, and be responsive to them. When you understand both partners' concerns, the two of you can brainstorm specific solutions. This approach works best when couples take potentially overwhelming is-

***"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."***

- Mahatma Gandhi

sues and break them down into smaller concrete concerns that can be addressed one at a time.

For instance, Heitler worked with a married couple who had disagreements about having kids. He loved his high-intensity job as a trial attorney, for which he worked late nights almost every weekday. She wanted to have a big family, which she said she couldn't handle on her own.

A compromise would've meant her saying that they can have two kids and him saying that he'll get home at six, Heitler says. However, for both partners, this would've been a raw deal.

But when they discussed their underlying concerns, they came up with a win-win solution. To help with the children, they decided to hire nannies, one of whom could stay in the evenings. "Her concern was more about handling children and less about how much time they spent as a couple," Heitler says. But she did have some concern about spending time together. The couple decided that once a month, they'd go on a weekend getaway. Over time, the husband didn't want to miss out on family time, so he ended up cutting his hours anyway.

### 3. Pitfall: Playing pin the tail on the donkey.

After an upsetting situation, you might think

that the goal of looking back at what happened it is to figure out who's at fault. If you're using the words "you should have," that's a giveaway that you're playing the blame game, Heitler says.

**Pointer:** Look back at your own behavior and ask yourself what you can do differently in the future. As Heitler says, "it's not your job to decide what your partner should do differently but to decide what you could do differently."

Heitler says that signs that you're learning are when you say things like "Next time, I think I will" or "Next time I think I could." Consider starting with these words when brainstorming your own future actions.

### 4. Pitfall: Letting escalating emotions take over.

"The hotter you get, the more likely it is that you'll race full speed ahead down the criticism and blame road. To stay on the road to mutual understanding and solution-building, avoid overheating," Heitler says. Excessive emotions can derail a conversation and turn it into a full-blown fight.

**Pointer:** When you're frustrated, angry or upset, it's best to pause the conversation. "Give yourself some time, and even a brief walk into a separate physical space, to calm down," Heitler says.

If you can't seem to de-escalate your emotions, then table the talk for another day. Make an agreement with your partner that when the conversation starts to heat up, you'll stop.

### 5. Pitfall: Thinking that marriage is like walking — anyone can do it.

This is similar to thinking that you're a good listener just because you can hear. We know that listening requires certain skills.

Heitler says that marriage is more akin to being a professional athlete. It "takes learning complex skills and lots of practice" to make marriage successful, she says.

**Pointer:** There are tons of marriage and relationship education resources available. For instance, Heitler co-created an online program called *Power of Two*, which teaches couples a variety of skills, including how to communicate effectively when you have differences, to build healthy and happy relationships. Other resources you can turn to include books, CDs, weekend workshops and therapists.

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# INNER HEALTH

## 5 Foods to Eat When You're Depressed

By Paula Spencer Scott

Feeling blue? Many people who suffer symptoms of depression seek comfort from favorite foods like chocolate kisses, salty chips, and pillowy pastries. But if you really want to boost your mood, make different choices, nutritionists say.

"We reach for what we think will make us feel better, but we too often wind up making ourselves feel worse in the long run," says Beth Reardon, director of nutrition at Duke University's Duke Integrative Medicine. The wrong foods can cause physiological reactions that intensify symptoms such as lethargy, irritability, and cravings. Meanwhile the right foods -- like the following five -- can stabilize blood sugar, eliminate mood swings, and boost neurotransmitters in the brain, all factors that influence how depression makes you feel.

Try these smart choices when your mood is depressed:

### 1. An omelet -- just don't skip the yolk - Eat it for: B vitamins and protein.

Other examples: Lean beef, wheat germ, fish, poultry

Why they help: A diet rich in B vitamins can help lessen the severity of depression symptoms. B vitamins, especially B-6 and B-12, can help improve neural function -- the way the neurotransmitters of the brain send signals, which helps govern mood. There's also a growing link between vitamin B deficiency and depression. A 2010 study of 3,000 older adults followed over 12 years found that those with lower intake of these vitamins had a higher risk of depression, according to the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

The protein in eggs (as with lean meats) helps you feel satisfied longer, stabilizing blood sugar. And eggs can be consumed in a variety of ways, from scrambled to used as a French toast batter to boiled and chopped up as a salad topper -- so long as you go easy on the accompanying animal products that are high in saturated fats, like bacon or butter.

### 2. Nuts and seeds - Eat it for: Magnesium

Examples: Pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, cashews, almonds, peanuts. (Green leafy vegetables and whole grains are also high in mag-

nesium.)

Why they help: Magnesium, a mineral found naturally in nuts and seeds, influences production of serotonin, a "feel-good" brain chemical. Magnesium also affects overall energy production.

Bonus: Nuts are also a good source of protein and healthy fats. And as a whole food, they make a healthy alternative to processed snacks, provided you choose unsalted and unsweetened varieties. Salt and sugared coatings don't add any health benefits and may make you overeat because they set up cravings in the brain for more and more salt or sugar.

### 3. Cold-water fish - Eat it for: the omega-3 fatty acids

Examples: Wild salmon, herring, sardines, anchovies, tuna (not more than once per week),

***"Plant your own garden and decorate your own soul, instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers."***

- Veronica Shoffstall

rainbow trout, mackerel. Fish-oil supplements are a practical alternative for those who don't eat these cold-water fish at least three times a week, Reardon says.

Why they help: There's a reason fish is known as "brain food." Fatty fish such as wild salmon contain the omega-3 fatty acid DHA, which has been shown to increase the membrane quality and nerve function of gray matter in the brain. Twenty percent of the gray matter in the brain is composed of DHA. Some studies have found that DHA consumption especially increases gray matter in the amygdala, the hippocampus, and the cingulate, three areas of the brain associated with mood. People with severe depression have less gray matter in these areas.

Fish is also a great source of lean protein, which stabilizes blood sugar. Eating small amounts of protein with meals can help keep your mood on a more even keel.

### 4. Ancient grains - Eat it for the complex car-

bohydrates

Examples: Quinoa, millet, teff, amaranth, spelt, barley

Why they help: Complex carbohydrates take longer to digest, which means they don't cause spikes in blood sugar that can create roller-coaster moods. Complex carbs also increase levels of serotonin in the brain.

While any whole grain is good, so-called "ancient grains" are even better, according to Reardon, because they're less likely to be modified and processed. Packaged, processed, and refined foods made with wheat flour and sugar, in contrast, tend to be digested quickly, causing blood sugar to spike. When this happens, the body responds with an over secretion of insulin, which winds up moving too much sugar into cells -- and blood sugars plummet. The end result: poorer concentration, fatigue, mood swings, intense cravings, and overeating.

Ancient grains are increasingly available at mainstream grocery stores and big-box stores such as Costco and Sam's Club. Look where rice products are shelved. Many ancient grains can be cooked like pasta or rice and served in their place as side dishes, in casseroles, or as a base for fish or chicken.

Bonus: Some ancient grains are a whole-grain alternative for those who are allergic to wheat or have gluten intolerance. (Barley, though, contains gluten.)

### 5. Green tea - Drink it for: the amino acid L-theanine

Examples: Hot green tea, brewed iced green tea -- including flavored varieties like jasmine green tea or berry green tea

Why it helps: L-theanine is an amino acid found mainly in tea leaves; it's been shown by EEG tests to stimulate alpha brain waves. This can improve focus while also having a calming effect on the body.

"Despite the caffeine, the L-theanine in green tea seems to be profoundly relaxing, with effects that last up to eight hours," Reardon says. L-theanine is easily absorbed and can cross the blood-brain barrier, adding to its effectiveness.

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