

Breakthroughs in healing

with Dr. Simon Sheh

Healthcare Edition

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HEALTHY SELF-CARE, HEALTHY WORKPLACE

THE FACT:

Canadians are losing battles on pursuing work-life balance.

THE STUDY:

Exploring the Link between Work-Life Conflict and Demands on Canada's Health Care System, co-authored by Dr. Linda Duxbury, Carlton University's Sproutt School of Business, reported on Ottawa Citizen, November 2004.

THE STUDY OUTCOMES:

Based on a massive survey of 33,000 workers since 1991, the study shows many Canadians suffer from "role overload" – the feeling that there is never enough time to get everything done. Sixty percent of the men and women surveyed feel that they cannot balance their jobs and family life. Yet 70% of these same workers – men and women equally – are also responsible for raising two children on average, 60% reported

having "elder care" responsibilities, and 13% said that they care for both children and an elderly relative. And despite these added family concerns, many said they feel they cannot decline to work overtime. The most highly stressed are managers in the not-for-profit sector. Key Predictor of Stress and Depression: The "sick" workplace culture of working long hours as the key to advancement. The "working long hours" factor topped other factors in the study, such as age of children, income, education, whether one or both spouses worked outside the home, or where they lived and worked, as a key predictor of stress and depression.

THE HEALTHCARE COST:

25% more physician visits, 17% increase in hospital stays, and 23% increase in the use of emergency rooms each year.

HEALTHY SELF-CARE BEGINS WITH HEALTHY BELIEFS:

1. Your life is bigger than your work.

- Work is a big part of your life, but it is not your life. Otherwise, when work goes down the drain, your life goes down the drain.
- The "my work is my life, my life is my work" belief is a perfect recipe for relationship injury in marriage and family.
- When a person has all work with no friends, no hobbies, no interests, and does not believe in vacations is a strong candidate for stress-related illnesses and relationship injury in marriage and family.
- A person who puts his/her identity, affirmation, and self-worth 100% on his/her work is most vulnerable to depression and anxiety related problems.

2. Money can buy you a house; money can never buy you a home.

- A house is about investment in things. A home is about investment in people.
- A person who has very high expectations on cleanliness, tidiness, micro-management, and "law & order," in the house is potentially a control freak and/or a clean freak and a strong candidate for relationship injury.
- A person who micro-manages in his/her workplace is usually an insecure, fear-driven, performance-based individual who does not trust people and has an excessive need for approval and affirmation from others.

3. Stress is unavoidable, but misery is optional.

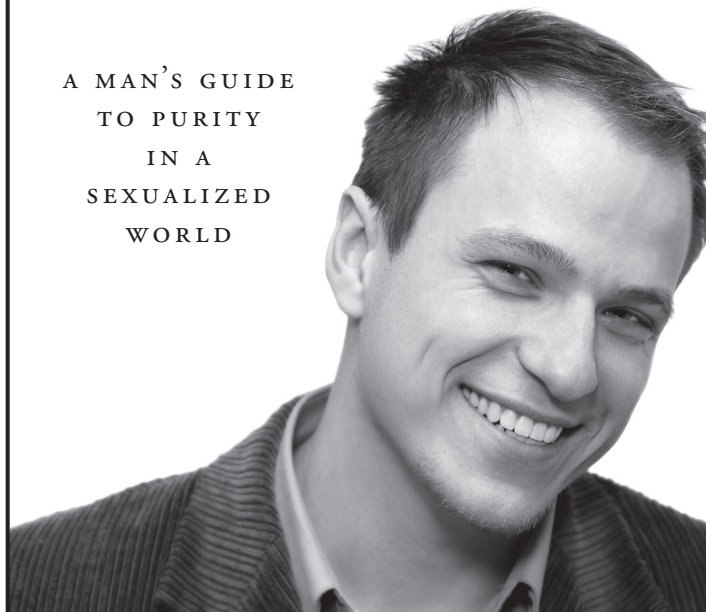
- Get to know yourself, your body, and your best-stress zone to better manage the challenges to balance work and personal life.
- A person who doesn't manage his stress well is potentially a miserable person to live with at home and/or at work.
- Committing a mistake on the job that is out of a person's character is potentially a warning sign from the "doctor within" about vulnerability and stress at work.

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4. Healing and restoration do not happen in isolation. Healing and restoration happen in a community of safe people.

- A safe community (a committed relationship, a supportive family, a faith community, a circle of friends and co-workers) offers voices of blessing that give you meaning to live and keep you going. Dr. Sheldon Tobe, a hypertension researcher at Toronto's Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre, reported to Canadian Press in 2004 that people who have high job stress should seek more support at home to balance out their life. Tobe says people under stress are at high risk of high blood pressure, which can cause strokes and heart attacks. If they have supportive relationships at home, that modifies the effect. If they have a stressful relationship at home, it will actually make their blood pressure worse. Dr. Tobe's study found couples who were the most mutually supportive and enjoyed each other's company had the lowest blood pressure.

5. Self care is not equal to selfishness.

- Give permission to take good care of yourself, because self care is crucial to the development of a healthy self-identity, which is the cornerstone of healthy mental health and relationship.
- A person who specializes in taking care of others but himself/herself, at work and/or outside work, is vulnerable to burnout, resentment, and anxiety related problems as well as at risk losing his/her own identity.

6. Healthy work-life balance begins with the individual, not with the employer.

7. Live so your children won't have to lie at your funeral.

HEALTHY SELF-CARE PURSUES HEALTHY PRACTICES:

1. Cardio-vascular exercises and activities for the release of beta-endorphins and corticosteroids, your natural neurochemistry to reduce anxiety, ease fear, and produce a calming effect.
2. At work and at home, do what you love to do, and do it better everyday.
3. Pursue activities in the community that give you meaning and purpose.
 - Pursue activities that are outside of your comfort zone and you have to give (time, energy, money) instead of receive.
 - Be part of a faith community. Scientific research has consistently shown that people who are members of a faith community usually cope better with life's ups and downs and challenges.
4. Create a Personal Mission Statement (PMS) to guide personal meaning and directions
 - Keep your PMS short, simple, direct, and make it happen.
 - A sample PMS: to live a simple, focused life that allows travel around the world creating eternal meanings in people's life.

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5. You travel light with small amount of baggage.
 - You have time and energy writing your present life chapter, e.g., chapter 52, instead of busy flipping back to your chapters in the past, reading them over and over again, because the old chapters have no summary and conclusion.

The stories of two men who choose to close some old chapters in their lives:

Men #1's healing letter to his mom:

"Dear Mom, all I ever wanted was just to be accepted for who I am. You were always telling me I didn't talk enough. I didn't care enough. I wasn't friendly enough. Always, always I'm not enough. Why couldn't you just accept that I'm a little bit different? I'm a creative person, we have our quirks. This doesn't make me deficient. In fact, I may one day do something wonderful if I can learn to be free. I would love to have someone celebrate my uniqueness, rather than try and force me to change into someone more "normal." If you don't receive that encouragement and support from your parents where will you find it? Why can't you tell me that, not only is okay to be different, but you're happy that I'm different, you love me for being different. Why must I always need 'fixing?' ... Would you just accept me for who I am? Tell me I'm good enough right now; right now, the way I am in this moment – that's good enough. I don't have to be better, I don't have to change, I I don't have to make a million, I don't have to be a "success;" I can just sit here and be me, and that's good enough. Tell me. Tell me I've always been good enough. Tell me I've always been good enough for you. Tell me I don't need to perform. Tell me I don't need

to earn your approval. Tell that little boy, who loves his mommy, that's good enough for her, she loves him just the way he is. It doesn't matter that he's shy. It doesn't matter he's sensitive. It doesn't matter that he's quiet and doesn't like to say much. She loves him just like that. She loves him because he's like that. He's a special little boy and he's good enough just as he is. Tell me."

Men #2's healing letter to his dad:

"Dad...I've always felt cheated out of a true childhood where my parents were there for me. You made me feel like I was an embarrassment and the only way I could get your attention were by lashing back at you. I tried so hard to get your attention and it always seemed like the only way you took notice of me was when we were arguing. I knew things got better towards the end, but I never remember being hugged. When I met my wife, it took a long time before I became comfortable with being hugged or giving hugs. I feel cheated by you. I think if we would have more time together we may have patched things up, but you only called me when help was needed. I'm mad at you dad. Why didn't you love me? Why didn't you believe me? Why didn't you brag about me?"

6. You set healthy boundaries on relationships
 - You know the difference between "backpack" and "big boulder." Everyone carries his/her own "backpack" of responsibility. When you carry other's "backpack," you are caring too much.
 - You recognize and observe healthy boundary with the opposite sex.
 - You realize it is OK to speak out and stand up for yourself.
7. You spend time with You, the man, or You, the woman. You matters
 - You know what You want and don't want.
 - You speak out and stand up on what You want and don't want.
 - You seek out You and spend time with You.
 - You know how to nurture You's upsides and manage You's downsides.

HEALTHY SELF-CARE WATCHES OUT FOR UNHEALTHY RED FLAGS:

1. All or nothing, black and white, right vs. wrong, perfectionist type of thinking.
2. Excessive anger.
3. Excessive control on people and things.
4. Addictions – alcohol, drugs, gaming, pornography, workaholic, extra-marital affairs, including e-affairs on the Internet.
5. Excessive internalization and inbreeding of thoughts and feelings.

Any person who spots the above red flags in his/her life should consult a physician and seek professional help for better self-care.