

SAFETY

MENTAL WELL-BEING IS AN ELEMENT OF SAFETY

Experienced industrial accident investigators frequently report that emotional distress due to personal or family matters is a precipitating factor in many accidents.

The Fatigue Bundle

While it is difficult to firmly establish a causal link between emotional distress and the occurrence of an industrial accident, it remains nevertheless a widely held belief that a correlation exists between the two. Informal chats among members of Occupational Health & Safety Committees completing accident investigations frequently center on the topic of the victim's emotional frame of mind just prior to the incident.

A common result of personal preoccupation with stressful situations is mental fatigue and distraction. The mental fatigue is accompanied by physical fatigue due to sleep disturbances that individuals invariably experience as a symptom of their emotional distress. Normally, the sleep disturbances are frequent, if not nightly. This **fatigue**

bundle can be further aggravated by other factors such as-- shift work, travel that is an essential part of work, or the inability to change (re-sequence, or rotate job functions to lessen the monotony and boredom of the tasks being performed).

When you have been up most of the night worrying about your sixteen year old daughter who didn't arrive home until after midnight, it is difficult to leave your concerns and worry at parking lot when you begin your shift at seven. In

fact, work can provide some degree of relief or respite from personal and family stress. As a rule, work is very task-driven, demanding, and compels us to keep our attention focused on the duties at hand. However, depending on our degree of preoccupation with personal matters and our propensity in certain instances to dwell on distress-maintaining thoughts, the result invariably will be drifting attention.



All of us have experienced attention drift. A common example is driving on auto-pilot with our subconscious handling the psychomotor tasks while pondering a personal matter. While eliminating of distraction and stressful issues in our lives is not always possible, learning how to effectively contain and redirect intrusive thoughts is achievable.

Where Do We Start?

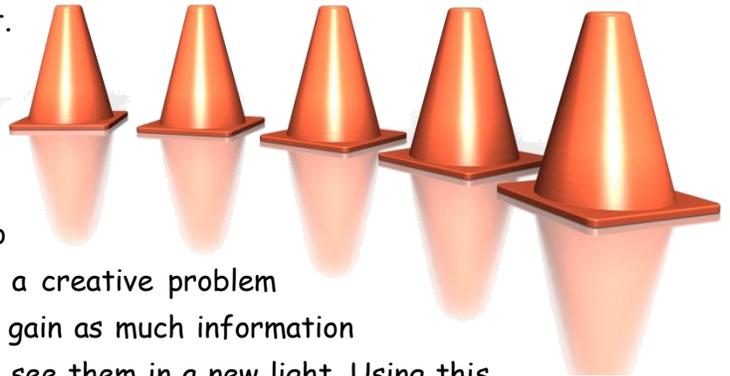
Begin by practising **Ways to Worry Effectively**

- Only worry if you are worrying towards a solution. Focus your energy and self-talk on the qualities that you possess that will help you reach a solution, even if it is only an interim solution.
- Do not dump on yourself. Your emotional response has to be reshaped and redirected towards some outcome, some action.
- Act as your defence lawyer and not your prosecutor. Review the good things that you do have in place and the elements on which you can build.
- Talk to someone you trust and respect. It's important to use your social supports so that you do not have to shoulder the situation in isolation.

Try putting these suggestions to work for you. At first it is not likely to be easy as worrying is very habitual. Give yourself some time to work at it.

The American novelist A. J. Cronin once wrote-

- *Worry never prevents tomorrow's sorrow; it only saps today of its strength.*



Doing something concrete about the tendency to be a habitual worrier is in fact learning to be a creative problem solver. Begin with re-examining the situation to gain as much information as possible. Then redefine the issues and try to see them in a new light. Using this view of the problem, generate as many options as possible. Appraise each of the options logically and develop the best ideas as fully as possible. Proceed to test them in the real world, which implies planning, initiative and self-discipline. While initial efforts may seem laboured, with practice they will become spontaneous.

Every point of stress represents an opportunity to strengthen ourselves. Avoiding this challenge postpones learning and weakens our ability to handle future stressors. Mastering problem solving skills helps us respond to challenges.

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