

In reviewing table 3, it becomes obvious that the freshmen perceive the fact that they have a special friend with whom to identify as one of the most significant values of the program.

As mentioned previously, all of the 45 freshmen participants who were interviewed, agreed Ag Partners was a most helpful program and should be continued. It is interesting to note that of the 45 freshmen participants, fifteen volunteered to become upperclass partners later in their college careers.

Conclusions

The purpose of Ag Partners, which was implemented in the Fall of 1982, was to match incoming freshmen students with an upperclassman enrolled in the College of Agriculture in a program designed to make the adjustment to college life easier for entering freshmen and in turn reduce attrition. As mentioned previously, the 1982-83 participants consisted of freshmen who were enrolled in an Agriculture Communications course and the 1983-84 participants consisted of incoming freshmen who volunteered to participate in the program.

The results of this follow-up investigation revealed that a noticeably higher percentage of freshmen who participated in the partners program persisted in school than UN-L freshmen who were not involved in the program. These figures become even more impressive when it is noted that the College of Agriculture's freshmen to sophomore attrition rate is slightly higher than the University average for the same period. Although the participants may not be a representative sample of University freshmen majoring in agriculture, the results strongly point to higher retention for these students.

The majority of the former freshmen participants felt that the program helped them identify closely with other students, groups, and organizations. This is in agreement with Astin's attrition studies, which indicate that these are characteristics of students who are less likely to drop-out of college.

The improved retention, help in meeting people and making friends, and overall adjustment to college makes a strong case for the continuation and expansion of the program until every entering freshman is paired with an upperclass partner.

References

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Guidelines for Coping Successfully to Avoid Burnout

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Previous research makes it evident that burnout is probably brought about by strain. This strain results from accumulated stress which the individual has not dissipated through effective coping strategies. Cherniss said it well: "Stress occurs when there is an imbalance between job demands and the worker's resources (skills, abilities, time, energy) for meeting them" (p. 158, 1980).

Hence if each faculty member can develop a better cadre of effective coping skills then it stands to reason the faculty member would effectively handle more stress which would not become strain. The end result should be a better quality of life. One would also expect that the person would be more productive, more content, and in general a more effective person.

One's Coping Repertoire

There are probably six key areas where one needs to develop and refine his or her coping skills. The areas are: knowledge of burnout, management skills, monitoring skills, interpersonal skills, activities to provide release of tension, and religion.

Knowledge of Burnout

It is important that all helping professionals come to have a clear understanding of the phenomenon of burnout. Readers are referred to the June, 1985 issue of the *NACTA Journal* (Newcomb & Clark, 1985) for at least an introductory treatment of the topic.

One also must develop a keen knowledge of self. Who am I? What are my strengths and weaknesses? Under what conditions do I perform best? What are the things that I allow to rattle my cage? It is essential that one answer questions such as these in order to develop a more accurate and complete understanding of self.

Each person is very much an individual. Until this is accepted then coping with daily stresses will be very difficult. Only you can accurately gauge your threshold of tolerance and begin to ameliorate the conditions that cause you to cross that threshold and begin to accumulate the strain that leads to burnout.

This means each person needs to spend some time thinking about specific things in the daily environment that are stressful. Consider environment, human interactions, external pressures placed on you as well as internal pressures that you bring to bear on yourself. Such self knowledge as related to stress will provide the foundation on which one can build a program to help alleviate unnecessary stress.

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Management Skills

Perhaps most important among the management skills related to coping with stress is effective time management. Time pressure adds significantly to one's daily stress. Readers should study Allen Laiken's book in order to make improvement in this area.

How one organizes for each day's work is also worth studying with an eye toward improvement. Cluttered desks, lost materials, forgotten appointments, and missed deadlines often come from a poor or nonexistent pattern of organization. A good filing system reduces stress and saves time. Having a system of work folders is very helpful. Keeping the desk organized and clean is a productive habit. Until such details of organizing one's work are taken care of it is difficult to reduce the stress generated by time/load pressures and the frustration of being ineffective and inefficient.

One also needs to use important time savers. Learn to dictate into a portable unit. You can dictate at a rate of about 200 words per minute. How fast can you write or type?

Delegate all work that can be delegated and spend enough time with those to whom you delegate to help them accomplish the task in an expedient manner. Learn to use the phone instead of formal written responses where possible. When this is done in a systematic manner it can be faster and far more cost effective than having a secretary type a formal letter.

Monitoring skills

It is important to learn to talk to yourself. Many of us in agriculture find suggestions like this unpalatable at best. Yet psychologists tell us that until one learns to listen to self and to what one's body tells him/her then true coping is substantially hampered. Honest introspection is in fact essential.

As you monitor yourself be sure to pay attention to whether you are experiencing sufficient variety. My research to date in the area of burnout, makes it clear that most people need sufficient variety in their work to counteract boredom and provide needed stimulation. Change the pace of the job both daily and over the quarter and the year.

A person also needs to take a few time outs daily. Take time to walk around the building, to visit briefly with colleagues, or to put one's feet up for five minutes. Such short breaks and mental excursions provide important and much needed refreshment and have been shown to increase productivity.

Interpersonal Skills

Repeatedly the literature and my own research make it clear that healthy interpersonal relationships are very effective coping devices. There are two groups of people whose social support is needed to counteract onset of the burnout syndrome. These groups are co-workers and family.

Every faculty member needs colleagues at the work station with whom he or she can interact. It is essential that faculty be able to share their hopes and

dreams, goals and fears, and accomplishments and failures with colleagues they can trust. We in agriculture have been noted for having a caring community. My latest research shows it is still alive and well. As we restaff for the future, let's be sure this tremendous asset is not lost.

Likewise faculty must have people away from the workplace in whom they can confide and place their trust. Here again the agriculture community measures up well.

Activities to Provide Release of Tension

This is an area where college of agriculture faculty do not do as well as is desirable. As a group we do not have nearly enough diversions in the form of recreation, outside of work interests, exercise, or in some cases healthful living. Hence here is an area where we can strive to further hone some important coping abilities.

Religion

Most writers, although not all, remain silent with respect to the utility of religion as a coping mechanism. It is my considered opinion that religion is clearly an important coping mechanism. As the stresses of life occur, most who are devoted to religion and worship find a great deal of help from meditation, prayer, the support of fellow believers, and the like. Not to draw upon the resources and help which come as a part of one's religious practices seems unwise.

For many of us who are faculty in agriculture, religion and our relationship with our creator becomes an important way of dissipating the ongoing stresses presented in daily living. By cultivating this source of coping strength individuals can deter the burnout syndrome.

Note also that through religion there are other built in coping mechanisms. For example, most religions provide a support group, a professional counselor, a series of activities which provide important variety to life, and other effective activities and programs.

Putting it all Together

What it all comes down to in a word is balance. Maslach (1981) said it well, "If all of the knowledge and advice about how to beat burnout could be summed up in one word, that word would be balance. Balance between giving and getting, balance between stress and calm, balance between work and home — these stand in clear contrast to the overload, understaffing, overcommitment and other imbalances of burnout."

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