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Together in Difficult Times

It seems that every time we turn on a radio or television news program, open a newspaper, or talk with neighbors, friends, and co-workers, we are reminded of the economic challenges we are facing in our nation and the world. Sometimes we hear concern regarding the seemingly corrupt economic and political decisions that leave us in wonder.

How we respond to this daily barrage of economic and political information/actions is important to our individual and family health. Continued employment status, loss of wages, or reduction in work hours at our current jobs may not be our choice. But each of us has an opportunity to choose how we respond to those external events.

Several evenings ago, I was watching a news program about a family that had lost their income and then their home. The television crew followed them around for a few days. The family had no car. All that remained of their belongings were in one large green hefty bag. The children had to leave their neighborhood school. The family had to take their hefty bag from the night shelter (that closed in the morning) to a day shelter that provided a school for homeless children and computer for the adults to job search. The day shelter also offered peer support groups. They returned to a shelter each night and started over again the next morning. Each day, they carried that green bag with them and repeated the process.

How did they do it? They did what was necessary for physical (food, shelter, and clothing) and emotional/spiritual survival. Without shelter, food, and clothing we can hardly focus on other needs. They found a network for physical and emotional/ spiritual support. People were there to help them and in the process they helped others too. Relationships are the key to success and survival.

We are hearing about many employers encouraging cost saving ideas from the employees. Management is working with employees to help survive the economic challenges together. Employers do not like losing trained and skilled employees. No matter how large or small the company, each department and each employee contributes to the success of the company. When a company loses an employee, the company loses a financial investment and personal investment. The cost for training employees from environmental engineering, manufacturing, patient care, and clerical positions is high. When losing an employee it impacts existing healthy working relationships, causing a lapse in productivity while the remaining employees make an adjustment. Most important, the company loses a valuable PERSON whose contributions and relationships cannot be duplicated.

Do we have strong relationships outside of our work? If yes, we are in a position to survive crisis. Jobs may come and go, but most family and friends are the mainstays. What if we are reliant on non-family relationships and loss of income forces a change in neighborhood, friends, schools, or churches and/or our extended family is undergoing the same losses? The good news is your ability to create and sustain relationships will help you forge new relationships. During crisis we all band together and become stronger because of the unity needed to meet our common needs and interests.

Having good, healthy relationships is the major survival tool to help us through tough times. If you don't have a reliable network of support outside of work, begin to develop them. If you don't know how to have a relationship, with friends, with a partner, with family, with co-workers or higher power, seek the skills needed. You can read a self-help book, take a course, or get into counseling.

Tips for Successful Relationships

- The most important relationship you have is with yourself.
- Know yourself, be honest with yourself, and RESPECT yourself !
- Find someone with whom you share interests, beliefs and values.
- Take good care of yourself. (Be fit emotionally, physically, spiritually, and financially)
- **All good relationships are based upon mutual respect.** (If everyone did just this, we would find greater harmony in workplace productivity, public encounters, in family systems and the world!)
- Ask questions, clarify, don't assume.
- Treat the other person the way you want to be treated.
- Communicate.
- Show the other person that you appreciate him/her.
- Know when to say no, and know when time and space are actually constructive tools.
- Remember what you don't do is as important as what you do.

In relationship to our world events, remember that we can all survive together. We may not shout "hooray", I lost my job or my car or my home; however, we can practice gratitude for one another. We can take comfort and joy in the small things of life that really are the big things.

Other simple coping skills we sometimes forget:

- 1) Acknowledge what we can control, i.e. what we spend and what we save, our actions with others, our attitudes.
- 2) Acknowledge what we can not control, i.e. the stock market, other people, recession/depression.
- 3) Accept that change is a part of living, i.e. the good, the bad, and the neutral; that it will keep changing.
- 4) Commit to being flexible during hard times, i.e. be willing to do something different to help yourself and/or your family adjust. (Be aware that financial stress can cause personal stress and be willing to be honest about the changes needed and talk with a professional when necessary to save your relationships.)
- 5) Meditate or pray to stay centered and remain focused on important things in life, i.e. love, kindness, family
- 6) Be glad we are breathing and breathe slowly and deeply – then exhale all the negative.

PS – limiting exposure to drama ridden conversations or news broadcasts about the status of our economy or the world may reduce the daily highs and lows.

If you would like any further information on this topic, please call The INTEGRIS Corporate Assistance Program at (405) 947-2688, metro and (1-800) 677-2729 rural.