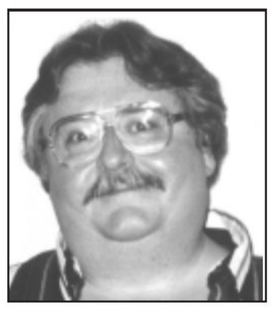
Plain talk
What's the good word?

COLUMN BY ROB BUKSAR



I can now count Polly Shea as one of my "old" friends. We have known and worked with one another successfully for twenty years. It's been great!

In a recent phone conversation, Polly and I were exchanging notes concerning our present personal and business circumstances. Some info exchanged was very good and some not so good. What seemed to be ever-present during our exchange was the growing level of toxic stress in both of our lives.

Time and circumstance didn't allow us to finish our phone conversation so I'll finish my end of it here. You might find some value in it.

We are all trying to survive a "stinky economy" and a major conflict on how America is going to define itself in the future—God willing we have one. Yes, when times get difficult as they are now, most of us fall into the could-a, would-a, or should-a mentality and start blaming and beating ourselves up for the problems we're immersed in.

This toxic stress derails our digestion, tightens our muscles, weakens our immunity, thickens our blood, harries our hearts, and cooks our cells into a stew of stress hormones. Not to mention high blood pressure, rapid and irregular heartbeats, back pain, muscle aches, skin disorders, and a list of problems and disorders that's long and still growing.

I guess the cave dwellers never realized how easy they had it. You see, the stress response was programmed into our ancestors' bodies where an instant "fight-or-flight" reaction to danger was a must for survival. In the good old days, you either took the threat on and immediately dealt with it, or ran like hell. Today the stress response is triggered dozens (if not hundreds) of times a day and is almost impossible to fight or get away from.

Yours may have been triggered lately by bored baristas; bullying bosses, customers or vendors; ringing alarm clocks and jingling cell phones; traffic jams and jammed printers; an endless epidemic of emails and a tsunami of tweets; mounting debts and dwindling bank accounts; and by a 24/7 news cycle that spins our emotional wheels with the lowdown that the planet is too hot, the economy is too cold, and the cookie you're about to eat may be poisoning you with salmonella.

Let's not forget the stressful encounters with your spouse, your kids, your coworkers, and the relentless collection agents chasing you for the medical bills you can't pay. The non-stop stress load is killing all of us but it doesn't have to. We can defuse the fight and cancel the flight.

The key to reducing or managing toxic stress and breaking up the cumulative negative effects is to find a trick or tricks to stay positive in an often very negative world.

Joanna Brandi is the author of "54 Ways to Stay Positive in a Changing, Challenging and Sometimes Negative World." Here's a quick look at some of her tricks for staying positive:

1. *Trigger the laughter effect.* Our bodies produce endorphins when we laugh, which makes us feel more optimistic. We can even trick our minds into releasing the positive chemical by pretending to laugh.
2. *Count those blessings.* Each night before bed, write down three good things about the day. Drifting off with positive thoughts in your mind can help you sleep better.
3. *Exercise.* Our bodies quickly get flooded with adrenaline when we feel stressed, which can make us feel panicky or combative. Physical activity—even a brisk walk up and down a set of stairs—burns off adrenaline, allowing us to feel positive.
4. *Use "What's the good word?" as a greeting and not "How are you?"* Using the word "good" at the start of a verbal exchange encourages people to offer positive responses—and their positive words help you be positive.
5. *Savor the positive.* Our minds seem to rush past the good and ruminate on the bad. Force yourself to slow down and fully appreciate small things that you enjoy.
6. *Create a list of the 10 most positive experiences of your life.* Label each with the primary feeling that it provided, such as joy, accomplishment, empowerment or enchantment. When you feel trapped by negativity, choose the feeling you need most from this list, and then mentally recreate the experience.
7. *Spend time with nature.* We all feel more positive when we spend 20 minutes or more each day surrounded by nature. Being in nature refreshes the spirit and reminds us that we belong to something larger than ourselves.

It's a stinker out there Polly, and the immediate future offers few signs of relief. So what are we to do? How's this? Focus on what we have and do the best we can with it. We're Americans and we don't like losing or losers, so this is no time for any of us to throw in the towel.

I appreciate you, love our friendship, and pray God looks out for you and yours. Till next time, what's the good word?

God bless America.

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