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It's a Sick World

By David Leonhardt

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It's no joy to be sick. It's even less joy when your child is sick. But the most unjoy is when you AND your child are sick together.

That happened to my poor wife a few weeks ago. She and Little Lady, going on three years old, both had a cold -- with all the sneezing and wheezing, hacking and coughing, wailing and whining required for a certificate of authenticity.

Little Lady normally bubble-pops with zest and vigor. Actually "bursting at the seams, bouncing off the walls and ka-booming through the roof" would be a more accurate description. So it was quite eerie to see her mope around like the drooping leaves of a Siberian Peonies that's been fed too much stale beer...not that I have a clue how the drooping leaves of a Siberian Peonies that's been fed too much stale beer would look.

Every now and then, the moping would be punctuated with a sneeze. Little Lady has a most flamboyant sneezing style, adorning the walls in unique patterns. No corner of the room is safe when she sneezes. In fact, her projection has taught her baby sister in her playpen across the room the fine art of dodging.

While I was cleaning up Little Lady's flamboyance, my wife was trying to sooth a sore throat that was threatening to rip her very insides apart. Normally she doesn't drink tea. Normally we don't even use the kettle, except to heat water for warming up the baby's bottle.

But this day was different. My wife was sick and she wanted a cup of tea. So she turned on the already full kettle, waited for it to sing, poured the water over a tea bag and sat down to enjoy a soothing cup of tea.

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I walked into the room. Frequent readers will recognize this critical error of mine from past columns. You'd think I would learn.

"This tea is soooo good, honey," she said.

"Uh, where did the water come from?"

"It was in the kettle. You know, not only is it soothing, but I feel like it's cleaning out my entire insides," she smiled.

"That wasn't water in the kettle."

"What was it?" her eyes were wide in alarm.

"CLR."

"Phfrrtprfrr!!!!" she blurted out. Suddenly I felt like a soggy version of our sneeze-adorned walls. I love being part of a new fashion trend.

When both your wife and daughter are sick, housework suffers. Not only are there fewer hands to clean things up, but those hands are more needy than usual. So it was with particular pride that I had managed on day 4 of their cold to actually catch up on washing the dishes.

OK, so I didn't quite catch up, but I was at the point where the stove and the table were clear of dishes. This was partly due to my uncanny talent for balancing dirty dishes several layers high on the counter, but it was also partly due to an hour-and-a-half of washing. All I could think was, "Nobody had better use any of these dishes after I spent so much time washing them."

SNEEZE!!! Oh no...more flamboyance. I put down the dish cloth and headed to the living room to survey the damage.

As I entered the living room...SNEEZE!!! I was becoming a professional sponge. All I needed was a certificate of authenticity to prove my credentials.

Before I could decide what to do next, I heard the distinct sound of juice being mixed in the very juice pitcher I had just finished washing.

I darted for the kitchen. "Noooo. I just washed that pitcher. Don't dirty it already." I lunged at my startled wife, and it took only a second to realize how useful I would have been to the Dallas Cowboys. And how useless I was in our kitchen.

It's no joy to be sick. It's even less joy when your child is sick. The most unjoy is when you AND your child are sick together. But if you want to be 100% free from all trace of joy, get sick while your child is sick and ask your sneeze-adorned husband to tackle you in the kitchen while you are trying to mix juice to wash the taste of CLR from your mouth.

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Reducing the High Cost of Absenteeism

By Etienne A. Gibbs, MSW, Management Consultant and Trainer

Employers pay a high price for absenteeism, often more than they may realize, in terms of both financial and production losses and employee morale. Managers may view the tasks of finding a substitute employee as a short-term inconvenience; however, absenteeism frequently has more serious long-term effects. Employers can, nevertheless, ensure that employees report in regularly and remain on the job.

Before employers can determine the best way to combat absenteeism, they must identify the organizational and individual factors that contribute to the problem. Among the most common potential problem areas employers need to explore are the following:

- * **Job satisfaction:** Employees who like their job are more likely to come to work than those who find work unstimulating.
- * **Work attitude:** Some employees come to work no matter how sick they feel, while others call in sick no matter how well they feel.
- * **Company culture:** If management's attitude is lax and absenteeism is accepted as a normal practice, the organization's culture may have to be changed before attendance can be improved.
- * **Excessive rates of sick leave:** As some insurance companies are now doing, employers need to monitor sick leave rates and reward employees who use fewer sick leaves.

Once you know the cause of absenteeism in your organization, it will become easy for you to correct, or minimize, the problem. But you have got to do your homework.

Remember: When you maximize your potential, everyone wins. When you don't, we all lose.

Etienne A. Gibbs, MSW, Management Consultant and Trainer, conducts seminars, lectures, and writes articles on his theme: "*... helping you maximize your potential.*" For more information visit

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