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Here you are again.

"Didn't you just leave yesterday? It seems like more seconds ago you turned off your computer, shut out the lights and bid your co-workers goodnight."

But here you are again. Stapler on one side, notebook on the other, and a sun is shining outside, taunting you what's negative about your work, and with the great weather you can't take part in.

Gotta work, you know. Be it changes in your job duties, caustic co-workers or just a general case of the blues, almost anyone can experience job burnout, according to Lisa Costas, a psychologist at the Employee Assistance Program. Warning signs include feeling stressed or out of control about your workload, staying late, emotional exhaustion, withdrawal from others and a lower work performance.

The good news: It can be reversed.

"Burnout occurs when negative factors outweigh the positive aspects of a job," Costas said. The trick is to find out what's negative about your work, and then either learn to turn it around or accept it on a new level.

Religious Studies Professor John Morreal, author of "Humor Works," says joking about a work problem is sometimes the best way to see it in a new perspective.

"If there's something (negative) in the workplace and there's nothing you can do about it, the best thing to do is kid about it," Morreal said. The joke helps you feel that you gained control of the situation.

It worked for "Dilbert" creator Scott Adams. The former Pacific Bell employee got ideas for his now-$200-billion comic industry from working in his cubicle late after day and feeling the frustration of working for a bureaucracy.

So Adams put his drawing pencils to work about his work, and made a bundle making jokes about his employment. But Adams still felt hurt when his boss realized he was the pointy-haired supervisor in the cartoon, and fired him. Adams needed to feel that sense of fulfillment his job provided him, Morreal said.

So how do you feel you're accomplishing something when all you want to do is duck under your desk and hide? The most important step is self-care, Costas said. Set limits for yourself in terms of responsibilities. Take some time off. Set clear goals for each day, and meet them.

That might mean learning to say no when your workload is already at a maximum. Bobby Ann Loper, the costume studio manager at the Theater department and recent author of "Keep Your Shop Happy: 12 Tips on How to Create a Positive Working Environment" in Stage Directions Magazine, advises laying down the law for your work environment can help you concentrate on the task at hand.

"It may seem hard at first, but in the end everyone will benefit because everyone can concentrate," Loper said.

Co-worker conflicts can be a quick cause of workplace blues. "A healthy atmosphere also is influenced by the personalities of people who work there regularly," Loper said. She advises banishing gossip rumor-spreading, personal problem discussions and overt sexual and racist remarks.

But what if you can't change a co-worker's behavior? Morreal advises using the brain tumor technique.

"For example, "Co-worker Bob" can't seem to clean out his coffee cups, and prefers to instead leave them lying about the office so fellow employees can marvel at the crusty stuff that dries at the bottom of his mugs. You're asked Bob repeatedly to take his Folgers with him when he leaves your office, but alas, the mugs continue to stray.

Enter the brain tumor. "Tell yourself, 'Poor Bob. Bob has a brain tumor, a tumor that doesn't allow him to remember to clean his coffee mugs,'" Morreal said. Once again, you've taken control of the situation by applying humor to it.

If bosses and managers should also fall back on humor when needing to correct or criticize a subordinate, Morreal said. Employees tend to become less defensive and focus on the mistake, rather than themselves, when the message is blunted.

And humor is healthy:

"When someone is stressed, their immune system is suppressed," Morreal said. But laughter causes the tissue chemicals in blood that cause stress to go down, thus boosting the immune system.

When all else fails, a job change might be in order, Costas said. USF's Career Counseling Services offers several programs to help employees find out their interests, and how they can be applied toward a career.

"USF has so many areas (for employees to seek career opportunities), if sometimes easier to look within than outside the university," Costas said. She's seen employees both switch jobs within the university system to find career satisfaction, and also just learn to cope with the stresses of their current job.

"You have control over how you choose to react," Costas said. "Some people stay at a job too long, waiting for it to change ... the main problem is prolonging (the stress for the employee who) does nothing to stop the process."

The Employee Assistance Program plans a six-week series on job stress, beginning April 21 through May 26. Each Wednesday from noon to 1 p.m., EAP will host a brown-bag session on different job stresses, such as surviving changes in job description, balancing home and work and managing people on the job.

Advance registration is required; call ext. 4-5649 for more information. The sessions will take place in the Student Services building, room 212B.

by Danis Arbuckle
Looking ahead: The Epidemiology and Bio-statistics departments sponsor the panel discussion “Tibet and China: A Look into the 21st Century” from 3 to 5 p.m. at the College of Public Health Auditorium. The discussion is part of Asian Celebration Week.

Saturday

Eat-n-dance: An Indian “Holi Picnic” is served at noon at the USF Riverfront Park, followed by the program “Dances from India” at 5 p.m. in the Cooper Hall Auditorium, as part of Asian Celebration Week. For more information, e-mail sanchez@admin.usf.edu.

Something to crow about: The Sun Dome welcomes Grammy Award winner Sheryl Crow, with special guest Eagle Eye Cherry, at 8 p.m. Tickets cost $23.75 and $27.75, plus a convenience charge, at the Sun Dome box office or any Ticketmaster outlet. For more information, call ext. 4-8936.

Monday

Speak up: The Employee Assistance Program workshop “Assertiveness and Effective Communication” takes place from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the Student Services building, room 2126. Participants will examine their non-verbal communication, learn natural assertiveness styles and practice skills through exercises. Advance registration is required; call ext. 4-5469 for more information.

Gotta have the last word: Hugo Award winner Joe Haldeman is the featured speaker for the “Last Lecture Series” at 6 p.m. at the Tampa campus Library. Haldeman, author of “Forever Peace,” will speak on “Inventing the Last War.” The winner of the Ruth and Frank Coleman Award for Excellence in Short Fiction Writing at USF will also be announced. For more information, call ext. 4-3439.

Batter up: USF Baseball challenges Central Florida at 7 p.m. at Red McEwen Field. Tickets cost $4; for more information, call ext. 4-4145.

Behind bars: Political activist and Professor Angela Y. Davis speaks on prison reform at 8 p.m. at the Tampa campus Special Events Center. The talk is part of the University Lecture Series.

Wednesday

Black symposium: The Spring Research Symposium, sponsored by the Institute on Black Life, takes place March 24 and 25 in the Phyllis P. Marshall Center. For more information, call ext. 4-4927.

Life changes: The Employee Assistance Program workshop “Women and Divorce: The Emotional Impact” takes place from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the Student Services building, room 2126. The workshop focuses on techniques for surviving divorce and looking beyond the losses. Advance registration is required; call ext. 4-5469 for more information.

Beloved lecture: Professor Kim Vaz speaks on “The Psychological and Spiritual Aspects of Beloved” at 4 p.m. in the St. Petersburg Campus Activities Center. Vaz will discuss themes in Toni Morrison’s novel, including grief from the separation or death of a loved one, and the search for a divine being. For more information, call ext. 3-3458.

Thursday

Biz whiz: The Small Business Development Center offers the seminar “Take Charge of Your Credit Card Programs” from 6 to 8 p.m. at 1111 N. Westshore Blvd., Suite 101B, Tampa. Participants will learn how to negotiate the best credit card agreements, and other skills needed to use credit cards. The class costs $30; for more information, call (813) 554-2381.

Don’t forget: Tampa Bay Holocaust Memorial Museum Director Steve Goldman speaks on “The Museum and Remembrance” at 6:30 p.m. at the St. Petersburg Campus Activities Center. Goldman will discuss the historiography of the Holocaust museum movement from a local, political and geographical perspective. For more information, call ext. 3-3488.