

HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

Suffering from 'Recession Depression?' Try Volunteering

Downsizing. Difficult. Depression. Dread. These are a lot of "D" words. But "D" words seem appropriate — even reflective — of the grade many of us might give our financial and mental states right now.

Corporate downsizing and increased unemployment can take a heavy toll on everyone. And the impact is more than economic. Difficult economic times also produce increased incidence of depression as well as a dread of dealing with personal finances.

Tough, even scary, news about our country's worsening financial condition continues to bombard us from television and radio broadcasts, printed pages and the Internet. To compound the problem, many Americans without jobs have too much time to dwell on their misfortunes and seemingly bleak futures. A downward mental spiral can lead to a range of feelings from a general uneasiness to serious depression.

Clinical psychologist Mary Gresham says, "This is a scary time even for those who are not in an immediate crisis," on the American Psychological Association's Web site.

"Many people," Gresham adds, "mistakenly believe that money stress can only be reduced by money itself ... the more you think about money and how not to lose more of it, the more anxious you will become and the less likely you'll be able to solve problems."

This certainly seems to be sensible advice, but it provokes an obvious question: How do you stop thinking about money problems? And that query prompts a simple response: Think about something else.

Thinking about something else may be accomplished best by thinking about someone else. Focusing on how you can make even a tiny effort to help another human being will immediately present a new perspective. Volunteering offers all kinds of benefits, some of them particularly important as we struggle to maintain our financial composure.

Research by the Corporation

for National & Community Service has found that volunteering leads to greater life satisfaction, lower rates of depression and improved physical and mental health. It reported that "when patients with chronic or serious illness volunteer, they receive benefits beyond what can be achieved through medical care."

American companies have taken this kind of research to heart and some even encourage employees to volunteer, offering them paid time off and company-supported volunteer opportunities. During the current economic downswing, this approach is more important than ever.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, a member-based financial services company in Minneapolis, Minn., has gone so far as to form an alliance with Habitat for Humanity International called Thrivent Builds with Habitat for Humanity. The company committed \$125 million over four years to assist with and help administer the construction of hundreds of Habitat homes each year.

It then reached out to members and employees, encouraging them to volunteer on Thrivent Builds construction sites in the United States

and abroad. One form of encouragement was to subsidize 50 percent of a limited number of days to volunteer through its "shared release time" policy. Another was to provide special discounts to members who wished to volunteer on Thrivent Builds sites in other countries. In providing these special benefits, Thrivent Financial was recognizing the importance of volunteering to the health and well-being of employees and members.

"We understand the life benefits that volunteering engenders," says Brad Hewitt, senior executive vice president and chief operating officer of Thrivent Financial. "And our alliance with Habitat for Humanity also aligns well with our company's values. We are committed to offering our members programs that engage their hearts, impact communities and demonstrate the value of their membership."

"We've heard time and time again from member and employee volunteers just how delighted they are in their volunteer experiences," adds Hewitt.

Another "D" word with a decidedly different spin.

Courtesy of ARAccontent

