

Sounds of silence

By Jeff Davidson

The sleepy underbelly of Orange County is no more. Noise has come to Chatham County in the form of construction, leaf blowers, cars, sirens, and barking dogs. Too much noise, however, is hazardous to your health or at least your peace of mind.

In the middle of any given Sunday, right when you are about to take your afternoon nap, some fool will click on his 130 decibel leaf blower and clear the yard. Why do I say fool? Because he's doing damage to his own hearing, upsetting the tranquility of the neighborhood, and not burning the calories or getting the exercise he would have had he used a rake. Noise intrusions outside of the home, when added to the TV, radio, phone, and common household appliances render us unable to have a quiet moment.

Many university based research studies and findings from leading health organizations indicate that exposure to intrusive noise is directly linked to a variety of health issues — notably among them, elevated levels of stress.

Constant exposure to unwelcome environmental noise increases a person's production of the stress hormone cortisol, and can lead to mental health problems.

Elevated levels of noise have also been linked to gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular problems, and other physiological issues. Even lower level noise has been linked to poor sleep, aggressive behavior, and a decline in job productivity. It's time for each of us to assess how elevated levels of sound have crept or perhaps, stormed into our daily environment, and how we can regain control.

If you are committed to adding more free and quiet time to your life, fortunately there are very simple steps you can take.

1. Rise each morning without an alarm clock. This sounds a little startling, but not nearly as startling as an alarm clock is to your system. You don't need that kind of jolt to start the day. Actually, it will take you two weeks or less to develop a routine whereby you can safely predict what time you will wake up each morning.

2. Have some quiet time at the

start of the day. Don't flip on the radio or TV or jump on the Internet soon after arising. Spend at least a few minutes in a chair quietly contemplating your day, meditating (if the spirit moves you), stretching, taking an easy stroll, or engaging in any other quiet, relaxing activity. It may seem as if you're not doing much, but giving yourself a few minutes like this at the start of the day can help improve your entire day.

3. After you tune in to find out the latest news from whatever medium you employ, get back to focusing on your day, your family, your career, and your life. Most of us, most of the time, are powerless when it comes to changing the course of national, international, or other broad-sweeping events, but we do have control over our individual domains.

4. Fighting the Route 64 traffic? If you commute to work, give yourself some noise-free time during that journey. If you drive to work, spend at least a few moments without flipping on the radio or the CD player. I know, that sounds contradictory to what you may have been doing the last five or 10 years, but give it a try.

5. At work, become aware of the

sanctuaries you can use when you need to find a quiet space. Sanctuaries may include the far table in the employee lunch room, an empty conference room, a bench outside of your office building, and so forth. Your ability to silently reflect on the task at hand, in such a setting, may be your most productive time throughout the whole day.

6. At least once a week, eat lunch in silence. This might require staying in your office or going back to one of the aforementioned sanctuaries, and forsaking the normal lunch routine with your office mates. Surely, four out of five days a week with them should suffice. The one day you eat alone, you get to chew your food completely, forget about keeping up with and participating in the conversation.

7. On the way home, repeat the process. Give yourself the opportunity to have many moments throughout the day in a noise-free environment. Silence can indeed be golden, and, in measured amounts, will help you to be more productive at work, better able to focus your attention, and better able to derive the best from yourself.

Jeff Davidson is the work-life balance expert for our time-pressed workforce. He wrote "Breathing Space" and the "60 Second Self-Starter." Visit www.BreathingSpace.com or call 800.735.1994 for more information on Jeff's keynote speeches and seminars.



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