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HEALTHCARE + STRESS RELIEF

Taking care of business - while caring for a loved one

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Many busy business owners, executives, managers and workers feel they can juggle their work and home responsibilities with aplomb. Yet the challenges of caring for an aging or ailing loved one can

impinge on the ability to get work done. A combination of strategies, resources and support can help caregivers continue to focus on their office work.

Add caregiving to your schedule.

Select times that are least disruptive to your work schedule. For example: early morning for processing paperwork and midday for communicating by phone with a loved one's care team. A flexible work schedule will enable you to take calls during the day from doctors and other care practitioners. Try to contact doctors in the early morning to give them time to get back to you during the day. Whenever possible, avoid scheduling work-related meetings at these times.

Set workday limits. Establish parameters for communication during the day. You may want to dedicate time for caregiver-related phone calls and e-mails and block out certain hours when you are unable to communicate, except in case of emergency. Make sure your administrative assistant or receptionist is aware of when you are available for caregiver-related calls.

Have a back-up plan. Brief staff and/or coworkers so that they can fill in, or at least serve as a stop-gap, if caregiving pulls you away from the office unexpectedly. Develop emergency procedures so the office can keep running in your absence. Keep a summary of client and project status, and update it at least twice a week.

Delegate. It is likely some of your daily tasks could be taken over by others. An added benefit is that delegation will leave you with additional time to dedicate to more productive tasks.

Communicate. Explain your situation to your boss, co-workers or employees. Depending on the nature of your relationships, you also may want to give clients a heads-up. Ask your boss for input and guidance on how to best handle work in the event of a caregiving emergency.

Create redundancy and portability. Store important files on a laptop or portable storage device that you can take with you while away from the office. Scan and store critical documents on a computer and keep hard copies in a file folder, ready to be placed in your briefcase if you have to dash out the door.

Look into corporate benefits. Consult with your employer's human resources or benefits department to find out whether caregiver benefits are available to employees. Flex time, counseling services, legal resources, eldercare information and access to other resources can facilitate caregiving decisions. If you work at a company that has at least 50 employees, you may be covered under the Department of Labor Family and Medical Leave Act (www.dol.gov/esa/whd/fmla/).

Know your rights. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has issued a report, "Enforcement Guidance: Unlawful Disparate Treatment of Workers with Caregiving Responsibilities" (www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/caregiving.html), which outlines employment rights that are protected under the federal Equal Employment Opportunity laws.

Know your loved one's rights. An older

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adult may be entitled to programs, services and benefits that relieve some of the cost and burden of care at home. The National Council on Aging Benefits CheckUp (www.benefitscheckup.org) offers valuable information on such resources.

Keep a list of resources. Write down the names and contact information of friends and family members who have offered to help. Identify community resources, including social workers, geriatric care experts and contacts at the hospital. If your loved one is receiving hospice care, be sure to keep a record of the care team. You may want to take a short time off from work to give you more time to secure resources and services.

Evaluate financial options. In-home hospice and nursing care may be more affordable and more comprehensive than unpaid leave from work. You may be able to work out a part-time or short-term telecommuting schedule as a way to maintain an income stream and a connection to the office. Sit down with an accountant or social worker to discuss the impact of caregiving on your job, income and lifestyle.

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