

POLICY WATCH – July 2018

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One lesson learned from the Great Depression was the need to be optimistic and not succumb to the doomsday pundits and Chicken Littles who wallowed in the negative, or in other words, to not get addicted to Pessimism Porn. These last 18 months of the Trump Administration have also started to produce a lot of despair. We again hear the pundits saying all is lost and that the America we love is no more. Focusing on the negative drains our energy and saps our creativity in solving problems, so we are revisiting Pessimism Porn in this issue.

Keeping a perspective and practicing self-care will help us get through this turbulent period in our history, so we can be strong and hopeful that the American Constitution and our values prevail over whatever challenges arise. We also share how employers are offering better well-being programs to help their employees be well in body, mind and spirit.

It's summer, when many take vacations and seek more R & R. So take a break today: turn off the TV, don't read the paper, take a social media holiday and go enjoy yourself. We live in paradise – take advantage of that good luck.

Best,



Cynthia

Pessimism Porn Redux

In our Policy Watch from March 2009, we wrote about the dangers of Pessimism Porn during the recession. We said, “Are you obsessing over the bad economic news, unable to leave your PC as you cruise the Internet searching for more tales of downturns, layoffs and financial failures? Is it hard for you to put down the business section of the paper or stop listening to MSNBC or its ilk? Do you find yourself craving news of the latest economic disaster while running out of people who want you to share it with them? If you answered yes to these questions, then you are experiencing Pessimism Porn (as coined by Hugo Lindgren in a New York Times article of the same name, February 1, 2009). This is the latest meme used to describe people gorging themselves on dismal financial news and economic forecasts.”



As you read that passage, it may occur to you that we are experiencing something similar now but with the political news. We are hooked on the cable news shows with their constant Breaking News stories of the latest flouting of our political norms and the political leaders' responses.

In that 2009 issue of Policy Watch, we said, "If you find yourself getting addicted to Pessimism Porn, watch out. There are consequences to such as irrational despondency. This wallowing in the mud of despair can lead to a loss of perspective and focus. If you dwell too much on the negative you can over-react to the

breaking news and work against your own best interest. You can find that your obsession is interfering with other parts of your life. You may get a "rush" from each news item, leading you to seek out more extreme sources. And you may lament that the people around you just don't react the way you expect over the bad economic news, causing you to feel isolated and alone. Of course, you could also feel superior and part of an insiders' club of people in the know -- who know that the worst is coming!" We think that warning applies today, too.

And though written in 2009, we think Thomas P. M. Barnett, at [Thomas P.M. Barnett :: Weblog](#), gives sound advice on pessimism porn:

"I made a decision a long time ago not to make my career a bet on bad things happening. I think that approach simply corrodes your strategic thought capacity. Human history is progress, so if you're constantly having to screen out the good to spot the bad, your vision will be unduly narrow. If you bet on progress, you can easily contextualize the bad, because progress is never linear. But if you bet on retreat, you must consistently discount advances as 'illusions' and 'buying time' and so on, and after a while, you're just this broken clock who's dead-on twice a day."

You Deserve a Break Today!

Cindy Otis (@CindyOtis on Twitter) writes a great Twitter thread on how to practice better self-care. "Today seems like the right time to do a thread I've been thinking about for a while on how to handle the seemingly never-ending deluge of depressing and disturbing news. My tips are based on my time as a CIA military analyst in which I dealt daily with disturbing content.

There are several risks to being overloaded with disturbing/negative content.

- ✓ Complacency - becoming so used to the deluge that it all starts to seem normal.
- ✓ Paralysis - that is, being so overwhelmed, you can't figure out what to do/how to move forward.
- ✓ Crisis perspective - you get trapped in the Breaking News cycle where everything seems like a potentially world-ending crisis to you.
- ✓ Depression/PTSD - you don't have to be on the frontline of a war have either/both. Disturbing content is absolutely a trigger.

There are also serious physical consequences to living a negative content overloaded life. I had a colleague who didn't know he had stage 4 brain cancer because the symptoms were the same as our very stressful careers--exhaustion, random fevers, stress, and dizziness.

So, what do you do? First, I strongly urge you not to ignore the news/current events. Ignorance is one reason we have this society. It won't make the problems go away & contributes nothing to their solving. Now that that's established, here's how to make it easier to handle:

1. TAKE ACTION. Volunteer for a food pantry, canvass for a political candidate, donate to an NGO, visit a sick friend. Seriously. Service of some kind in your community lets you be part of SOLUTIONS. You will see RESULTS when otherwise you'd feel helpless.

2. Conversely, for those who may take tip #1 to the extreme--know that you alone can't save the world. Accept your limits. You aren't a 7/11. You can't always be open. At the end of every day when I reached my limit, I silently told myself, "I've done what I can today."

(Note: Repeating that to myself did not stop me from feeling like I could have done more most days. But it was important to tell myself anyway because I am human. We are human. It's good we *feel* things.

3. RESEARCH BEFORE PANICKING. Easier said than done, but everything will seem like crisis/earth-ending if you don't know what has/hasn't happened before. If it has happened before, it's can be hugely comforting to know how it was resolved and/or what might happen next.

4. GET UP & MOVE. Put the phone away, turn off the TV, log out of Twitter. Go for a walk, sit outside, get some coffee, call a friend. CIA is full of ppl walking the building with a colleague/friend. There's a reason. Our brains & bodies need breaks from stressful content.

5. SET RULES. Because of my work at CIA, I had a rule--I only read fiction at home. I had enough reality at work. In the civilian world, I set blocks of time each day where I turn everything off--no news or social media. Let yourself recharge so you can keep fighting later.

6. AVOID DARK HOLES. (I'm sure there's a joke to be made about that.) It's easy to get sucked into the swirl of bad news. You watch a gruesome YouTube video and the next one is all queued up to play right after it. Focus on one issue at a time. Deal w/ it before moving on.

7. YOU NEED FUN. When there is suffering, war, despair, etc. around you, it's easy to feel guilty when you have fun, feel happy, have a good meal with friends. You NEED these things. You will be better able to do good in the world if you let yourself have these things.



8. TALK TO SOMEONE. Often, we curl inward socially when overwhelmed w/ negative content. It's a means of protection. One of the great things at CIA was that everyone else knew what you were going through. Whether it's therapy or talking to your person, talking helps.

None of this is easy. I got burned out a lot in my career & many days recently, I've felt overloaded by the barrage. I'm sure you have too. But you and I can't check out. We can't give up & we need to stay engaged, but we can't do that if we get overloaded. Keep going.”

We get more tips in [How to #StayOutraged Without Losing Your Mind](#) by Mirah Curzer, The Coffeelicious, ([Link](#)). Curzer says:

Focus Your Energy on One or Two Issues

You can't show up to every march and donate to every cause. You can't write treatises on every issue and argue with every Trump supporter on your Facebook page. If you want to be effective on *anything*, pick an issue or two that matter most to you and fight for them. Let the others go.

Make Activism Fun

Do things that are good for the world but do them in ways that you personally enjoy. Yes, call your representatives, but maybe make a contest of it with your friends, like you might challenge each other to achieve workout goals. Volunteer for an immigrants' rights clinic with a group of colleagues, and then go out for drinks afterwards and feel free to be proud of yourselves. Go to the Women's March with your mom and your sister and your best friend — and have an amazing time. Laugh, sing, chat, and flirt while you're voting with your feet.

You don't have to suffer to make a difference.

One of the best ways to make activism fun is to make it easy. Resolve to do something small every day, without fail. There are many 'daily action' lists going around, each with different emphasis, but they're all very similar. Pick one and commit to following it. It will make you feel great, and will do wonders to combat that helpless, hopeless feeling. Plus, by doing something every day (even if it's small) you will actually accomplish a lot — probably more than if you only do *big* things once a year.

Don't forget to play to your strengths. There's no need to force yourself to do a kind of work that you find unpleasant or boring. If you're a writer, write articles shedding light on important issues, convincing the other side or rallying your allies to action. If you're an artist, make art with a conscience. Teachers can bring social justice into your curriculum. Lawyers can volunteer at free legal clinics, write amicus briefs, do pro bono work. No matter what your passion is, there's a way to use it for good and have a great time doing it.”

The Simple but Effective Way to Stop Worrying So Much

If the above tips aren't enough, Amy Morin, writing for Inc. Life, says in [The Simple but Effective Way to Stop Worrying So Much \(It Sounds Ridiculous, But It Actually Works\)](#) ([Link](#)) that “Science shows you can contain your worries to 30 minutes each day.”

Here are Morin's six quick and simple strategies for reducing the amount of time and energy you devote to your worries:

1. Pick a 30-minute time slot to worry and put it in your schedule every day.
2. Keep your worry time and place as consistent as possible and don't schedule it too close to bedtime.



30 min

3. Catch yourself worrying outside your allotted time and remind yourself that you'll worry later. (Write down your worry right away if you're worried you're going to forget about it).
4. When you reach your worry time, set a timer for 30 minutes.
5. Sit and think or write your worries in a notebook, whichever you prefer.
6. Keep practicing and you'll find that warding off your worries gets easier over time.

Morin says, "Schedule time to worry for two weeks and you'll likely notice that you're feeling better and sleeping better because your worrisome thoughts will no longer drain your [mental strength](#) all day long. She cautions, "If your anxiety is serious, however, it's important to see a trained a mental health professional. Anxiety disorders are treatable and, without help, they can grow worse over time."

Tips to Help with an Anxiety Attack

Look around you.

Find 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

This is called grounding. It can help when you feel like you have lost all control of your surroundings.

Corporate Workplace Well-Being Trends to Watch in 2018



Employers are working to improve their employees' well-being in many ways. Responding to the higher stress levels that employees report experiencing, they are looking to help, and also finding benefits from increased employee engagement and productivity.

Ann Wyatt, in [5 Corporate Workplace Well-Being Trends to Watch in 2018](#) (Talent Culture | November 27, 2017 [Link](#) shares these trends:

The corporate vending machine comeback

Mark it down: 2018 is the year we'll see the comeback of the corporate vending machine! I like to call it "vending machines 2.0." These vending machines will include healthy options like granola bars, popcorn, pretzels and trail mix. In fact, you're already seeing this in the consumer world as CVS is experimenting with vending machines filled with vitamins and healthy snacks.

Tackling stress differently

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently called stress the health epidemic of the 21st century. In fact, [one recent study](#) found that work-related stress costs U.S. businesses \$30 billion a year in lost workdays (some estimate it at \$300 billion).

That's a serious business issue, folks.

It's not like companies don't know this is an issue among employees. They understand that. But, in 2018, I think you'll see companies take a little different approach.

For example, I believe you'll see more companies turn to meditation and mindfulness for help. Mindfulness, in particular, has been said to boost creativity and sharpen focus—two things that employers are eager to retain in the “always-on” age. For example, one of our manufacturing clients offers its employees a release and relax class — a simple 15-minute meditation class where employees are not required to change their clothes.

Finally looking closely at sleep

Sleep deprivation is another issue employers are painfully aware of—and one they also understand is plaguing today's workforce. A [recent RAND study](#) estimates sleep deprivation costs U.S. employers roughly \$411 billion annually. And we thought stress was a big issue!

Expect to see more employers tackling sleep deprivation head-on through formal sleep awareness and education programs, as well as incentive programs that track an employee's sleep and provide points towards rewards for achieving set sleep goals. I believe we'll also see more employers make room for on-site nap rooms (believe it or not!) and sleep pods as a way to give employees a break and boost productivity.

In [A Shift in the Focus of Wellness Programs](#), Alan Kohll, (Forbes, [Link](#)) says, “When corporate wellness programs first took off, the focus was primarily on smoking cessation or weight loss goals. Current wellness programs have come a long way since then – and program offerings have expanded to focus on more than just the physical aspect of health. Employers are now using corporate wellness programs to increase employee engagement and to become an employer of choice. Companies are doing this by combining more traditional well-being efforts with career development efforts.”

Kohll says, “Wellness goals and career development can be combined to create a more positive work environment and successful employees. This idea of collective well-being will not only help support a healthy workforce but will increase a company's reputation of caring for its employees. Wellness initiatives will begin to include aspects such as learning and development classes, employee recognition and workplace design. For companies looking to increase recruitment and retention efforts, shifting a focus to include collective well-being will help keep current employees happy as well as attract new talent.”

Kohll predicts:

More Personalized Experiences

Employees want personalized experiences in their corporate wellness programs. Wellness isn't a “one-size-fits-all” solution. Wellness initiatives that are important to one employee might not be as important to another. Every employee's journey to a healthier lifestyle is unique, and it should be treated as such. To create a more personalized experience for employees, employers will continue to use more digital platforms to host their wellness programs.

Using these types of platforms will help employers determine specific wellness goals and activities for each employee based on their current health status, interests and preferences. For example, data can be easily collected through integrating fitness trackers with a [wellness portal](#). This technology can be used to help connect employees with similar health and wellness goals as well as support and reward individual

progress. Employers can expect to see higher participation rates with a more personalized approach to employee wellness.

Emphasis on Mental Health

Mental health programs are becoming more popular now than ever. While mental health remained a stigma in the workplace for many years, more employers are now embracing mental health education as a part of their workplace wellness programs. With [84% of employees](#) experiencing physical, psychological or behavioral symptoms of poor mental health, it's essential to [break the stigma of mental illness](#) in the workplace.

Many employers are leading the way by emphasizing the importance of mental health in wellness programs and including wellness objectives to help promote healthy mental well-being. Expect to see more employers promoting the use of [mental health days](#), providing assistance or coverage for therapy or counseling services and encouraging employees to practice self-care.

Keeping Wellness Simple

This upcoming year, more workplace wellness programs will be switching to a ["less is more" approach](#). One possible reason for employers not seeing the participation levels they want in their wellness programs is because the program is too complicated. Employees desire simple, uncomplicated wellness tasks and objectives – most likely because they already have enough on their plates. The last thing employers want to do is stress out employees even more by asking them to complete complicated tasks.

Workplace wellness programs can be simplified by focusing on five key factors that contribute to a successful wellness program: accessibility, communication, health assessments, screenings, and health education. By keeping employee wellness simple, employers can expect higher participation rates and less confusion surrounding wellness initiatives.

AI and Wellness

It looks like AI might be finding its way into corporate wellness this upcoming year. Some experts are predicting that AI software will become a prominent feature of HR and wellness, as it can be used to identify trends and make accurate forecasts for the future. Employers can use this technology to collect and analyze huge amounts of data to improve their wellness initiatives. AI software will be able to provide better personalization and rapid responses for employees.

Virtual healthcare providers are another exciting prospect for employers embracing AI software. Employers could potentially use AI powered chatbots to assist employees with questions regarding nutrition, disease management and overall healthy lifestyle management. These chatbots will be available 24/7 on any mobile device – making wellness even more convenient for employees.

Janet Lee, also looks at wellness trends in [7 CORPORATE WELLNESS TRENDS FOR 2018](#), (EXOS [Link](#)). She says:

1. Expanding the definition of wellness.

People are moving beyond focusing solely on their health. They want to be at their best in all areas of life. 'That includes nutrition and spiritual, emotional, and financial aspects,' says Amanda Carlson-

Phillips, EXOS vice president of nutrition and research. 'It's a broader concept of well-being versus wellness.'

As a result, companies will begin offering a broader range of services designed to improve employees' lives — not just weight loss or smoking cessation programs. Financial counseling, mental health support, relationship skills training, and similar programs go way beyond the scale and the gym. Is your company keeping up with what's becoming the new status quo?

2. Emphasizing value on investment.

Companies will realize that focusing solely on health care costs as a metric for evaluating corporate wellness profitability is myopic. The benefits of making employee well-being a priority can't entirely be captured in a spreadsheet.

More successful recruitment, improved morale, reduced presenteeism (feeling you must come into work even if you're sick), and increased employee productivity and engagement reflect the VOI that wellness programs can deliver.

4. Striking a balance between tech and touch.

In keeping with the times, any new program offering will likely have an aspect of technology included, but 'tech alone isn't the answer,' Elsey says. 'The human connection is important so organizations will be looking to the staff — whether it's their own people or vendors' support teams — to help [leverage the technology](#) to drive meaningful engagement and impact.'

Many companies who are selling wellness programs may be good at developing flashy tech-driven systems, but they may not have the expertise to translate how those bells and whistles will actually help employees make behavioral changes. Organizations are beginning to seek out wellness solutions that can connect all the dots.

5. Modernizing and personalizing nutrition programs — and beyond.

Calorie counts and sodium content are so 2010. 'Focusing on things like that can be helpful for some people, but it's a little archaic,' Carlson-Phillips says. 'We have this ability to go outside the traditional medical channels now to test your genetics, how well your gut is functioning, and more. We don't want to abandon general nutrition science, but people today know so much more about how their bodies work. If I'm not salt sensitive, I don't care about sodium guidelines.'

As people start to understand more about themselves — their microbiome and genes, for example — wellness programs will be adapting by offering more [personalized screening and recommendations](#) versus one-size-fits-all guidelines.

The genetic testing aspect is still evolving but as its potential becomes clearer, many people will want to use it to spur healthy changes or to seek medical intervention, if necessary. Organizations will need staff or partners capable of interpreting the results responsibly and guiding appropriate action.

7. Addressing musculoskeletal pain.

According to a [2015 report from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#), nontraumatic joint disorders like arthritis are among the five most costly conditions for Americans, accounting for \$43.3 billion in medical spending. Back pain and carpal tunnel syndrome are two significant drivers of absenteeism and workers' compensation claims.

‘This kind of pain is a barrier to physical activity, focus, and living the life you want, and it’s becoming an epidemic,’ Eley says. ‘There are vendors out there that are emphasizing movement efficiency and even looking at how they can utilize tech to solve the problem.’

Forward-thinking companies will be eager to find a way to protect employees and nip pain-related issues in the bud.

SMART Fest: A North Bay Celebration!

SMART wants to give a big thanks to our North Bay community for supporting us during our first year of service. It’s been an amazing year and the SMART train is celebrating with SMART Fest, a free festival, on Saturday, August 18. You can take the train to SMART Fest with free service offered on August 18 and 19, including additional morning runs to get you to the festival.

SMART Fest will be held 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Novato Hamilton Station, located at 10 Main Gate Road. The celebration will include live music, some of the North Bay’s tastiest food trucks, and delicious local beer and wine. SMART Fest will also feature free activities for children and vendors from North Bay businesses. We look forward to seeing you there!



Members in the News

Sunny Hills to Side by Side

Founded in 1895 as an orphanage, Sunny Hills got its name in the 1930s from its idyllic San Anselmo campus. In recent years, though, the organization has evolved significantly beyond its campus and its early mission. Because of this expansion, the group decided it needed a new name, one that better captured its broad spectrum of programs and the essence of its work with young people.

Kaiser Permanente is Ensuring Continuity of Mental Health Services for Those Affected by Fires

A \$1 million grant to the County of Sonoma and a \$500,000 grant to Santa Rosa City Schools will extend the work these two organizations are doing to help local—and often our most vulnerable—people cope with the effects of last October’s wildfires.

Midstate Construction Corporation Recently Completed Rehabilitation of Mackey Terrace

Midstate Construction Corporation recently completed rehabilitation of Mackey Terrace, a senior residential community in Novato, CA for owner EAH Housing.

Redwood Credit Union Honored as Volunteer of the Year by the Napa County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Redwood Credit Union (RCU) was recently honored as Volunteer of the Year at the 7th Annual Blend of Cultures Award Recognition and Gala by the Napa County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Redwood Credit Union Offers Free Document Shredding Event in Santa Rosa

Redwood Credit Union (RCU) is hosting a free document shredding event for the Sonoma County community on Saturday, August 4, 2018 from 9 a.m. to noon at their administrative offices at 3033 Cleveland Avenue in Santa Rosa.

Woodruff Sawyer's Award-Winning Women

We've known for years that these three individuals are experts in their respective fields, bringing incredible knowledge and savvy to their practices. Recently, each of them has been recognized by outside sources for their professional contributions. Please meet Kristy Furrer, Priya Huskins, and Kristina Keck.

Sonoma Raceway Hosted NASCAR Weekend and Raised More Than \$210,000 for Local Youth Groups

Charitable programs combined to raise more than \$212,500 for local youth groups during the Toyota/Save Mart 350 Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series weekend at Sonoma Raceway

Read more online at www.northbayleadership.org/news



Who We Are

Over twenty five years ago, business leaders founded the North Bay Leadership Council on a simple premise: We can accomplish more by working together. Today, the Council includes 54 leading employers in the North Bay. Our members represent a wide variety of businesses, non-profits and educational institutions, with a workforce in excess of 25,000. As business and civic leaders, our goal is to promote sound public policy, innovation and sustainability to make our region a better place to live and work. For more information: Call 707.283.0028 / E-mail info@northbayleadership.org

www.northbayleadership.org