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Stress Management

An interview with Barbara Mackoff, author of *Leaving the Office Behind*

By Roland L. Madison

Barbara Mackoff was the keynote speaker at the Forty-Sixth Joint Annual Meeting of the AWSCPA and ASWA held October 15-18, 1986, in Kansas City, Missouri. Dr. Mackoff is a psychotherapist and training consultant whose seminars focusing on work-related stress have been attended by government, financial, medical, and professional personnel across the country.

The questions and answers which follow are based on Dr. Mackoff's keynote address and her book, *Leaving the Office Behind* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1984, Dell 1986). The interview was conducted by Dr. Roland L. Madison, Associate Editor for *The Woman CPA*.

Q. Both in your keynote address and in your book, you repeatedly stressed the importance of 'looking back' at your day before leaving the office by noting such items as the agenda covered and the colleagues you worked with during the day. Why do you feel this 'looking back' technique is important? What does it assist you in doing?

A. If you don't review the day and get some perspective on it, then you may end up passing on the issues and the tension of the day by carrying them into the evening you hope to enjoy and also passing the tension on to the **people** you hope to enjoy. So the whole purpose of looking back is that you have a resolution of the day; this means you have to look back in order to look forward. The point is to look inside your day — make a resolution of it — make some peace with it and you then finish that business of the day. Leave the day behind and get on to the business of enjoying that evening with family, friends or time alone just relaxing.

Q. You suggest that laughing at your mistakes may provide relief from a stressful work situation or experience. Is this laughing inter-

nalized or is it laughing in jest openly when we commit a faux pas? When you say 'laughing at your mistakes,' what situation are you describing?

A. It's all of those things. I am really talking about using humor to gain perspective. So, in the first instance you mentioned, it would be a kind of silent comedy; that's where you use a sense of humor to just relabel a situation in your own mind. To give an example, a woman who was under a really stringent deadline internalized her silent comedy. She viewed herself as a duck, because ducks are calm on the surface, and they are paddling like hell underneath. No one ever knew she had that image of herself, but in her own mind this was her silent comedy that gave her a way of humorously relabeling a situation and reducing the stress of it. There is also a kind of comic dialogue where you invite someone else to look at a situation with you and invite them to see it as being funny. An example would be when I saw someone bring a wrong slide tray to a presentation. After about two slides, it was clear to all these were not the right slides. She invited her audience to laugh with her about it. What she did was roll her eyes up towards the ceiling and she borrowed a line from *Star Trek*. She said, 'Beam me up, Scotty!' You

know, just get me out of this situation! Naturally, everybody laughed and while they were laughing she ran down the hall and returned with the right carousel of slides. But that's an example, as you put it, of using humor outwardly or, at the very least, sharing a common perception with other people. This invites other people to relabel what might be a negative moment and reduce the negative impact of that bite by labeling it out loud as 'this isn't threatening . . . I can make a mistake. I made one this time and maybe you'll make one next time.' I think that's what a sense of humor says, and it's very powerful relabeled in that way.

Q. We often use exercise as a relief from stress by trying to work things out with ourselves while we are running, playing tennis, etc. What are some of the common excuses people give for not being able to engage in a half hour or so of physical activity each day?

A. The most common one is 'I'm too tired.' We **really are** tired at the end of the day. It's a kind of mislabeling because usually 'being tired' probably means that all day long we've had lots of stressful events, but we haven't been able physically or viscerally to react to them. What we've done is sit still all day. We've been very polite and very measured, and while at the end of a day we say we're tired, what's really happening is our bodies are housing a day's worth of accumulated tension. Exercise throws that tension off, and moderate exercise will make everyone feel **more** energized rather than **less** energized. I think another excuse used is 'I don't have time' and that's true; however, I always say to people **you don't have time not to exercise**. Exercise is the quickest way of throwing off the tension, recharging the sense of energy, and coming home refreshed to enjoy the evening. Actually, for people who don't appear to have time, there are ways of making time. It may be paying a baby sitter extra so your child is taken care of or getting up a half hour earlier or exercising during the noon hour. Other opportunities to exercise are parking in a more distant parking lot or simply using the steps in your office build-

ing instead of the elevator. I think everyone needs a physical exorcism of the day by exercising in some way. You may take a walk around the block with your son when you get home, but do something that allows you physically to throw off some tension. In the final analysis, excuses commonly used are really not good enough.

Q. *When a spouse returns home after a rather stressful or taxing day and is greeted with the cheerful question, 'How was your day, Honey?' you suggest that a person edit and shade the response of their feelings at times. What are those two techniques and what do they accomplish?*

A. What editing really accomplishes is that you don't spend from the moment you walk in the front door until the time you go to sleep talking about work. Editing is like that teen-ager's line, "Please! Spare me some of the gory details." What you should do is come home prepared to share the highlights of your day — hopefully with some humor — so that work gets talked about fairly early in the evening and then you move on to other topics. Editing really means cutting down the sheer amount of verbiage that is devoted to office topics. It gives you time to engage in other interesting, and perhaps more intimate, topics. **Shading** is important, too. I think what happens is we have to be so controlled in a professional sense on the job that when we get home, what we want to do is vent. When we vent, we tend to exaggerate, and when we exaggerate, we make a bad situation seem worse. Someone listening takes it quite seriously. Instead of coming home and saying, 'the worst thing in my life just happened today — my career is over,' what you want to do is really try and shade your feelings and say, 'on a scale from one to ten, how frustrated am I?' Ask yourself, 'In my history of worst days on the job, where does this one stand?' so that we don't overstate the present case. When you come home and constantly overstate job frustrations, you tend to wear out that sympathetic ear. The idea of 'shading' is to label something 'red' when it's really 'red,'

but not to 'over label' and sometimes evoke the concern and anxiety of another person because you stated the case too strongly. It's really not necessary to do that. We don't want to wear them out by overstating.

Q. *Instead of using some of the subliminal or diversionary approaches suggested, why bother discussing your day at any level with your spouse? Why not simply internalize it instead of 'taking it home' to burden your spouse?*

A. I think everyone has to talk about what happened at work that day and, at the very least, bridge the gap between whatever your task orientation was on the job to make an emotional bridge to someone. I think there's a wonderful blues song that says, "how can a person go to work in the morning and come home in the evening and have nothing to say?" What that is saying is when you get together with someone that you care about, whether it's a friend or your spouse, and if you say "How was your day?" and they say "Fine," that's the end of it. There is no way to make that bridge between the world you spend eight or ten hours in and the world that you share together. So I really encourage people to talk succinctly about what happened at work as a means of sharing another person's life and, for ourselves, to find what we accomplish at work and what we don't accomplish. For someone to have an intimate understanding of us, we have to talk about work. My pitch is work is not the **only** thing you have to talk about with someone that you love. Too many relationships get a job focus as a topic of conversation. Of course, with sixty percent of the couples in this country being two-career couples, you have a lot of households where it takes the whole evening for them to talk about work. The couples are forgetting about the emotional and sexual glue that brought them together in the first place and that happens all the time. There is too much job talk and not enough sweet talk and not enough talk about the interests that brought them together in the first place. Whether those interests started in politics, current events, the symphony, bird-

watching, or fishing, I don't care what it is. Simply put, too many couples **just talk about work**. The overall goal really is editing so that you talk about work just enough to make the bridge, but not so much that it is your whole life or your whole conversation.

Q. *Before a person attempts to offer advice to individuals about their work situation, are there any 'do's or don'ts' for the advisory role person to consider?*

A. I think there are a couple of inappropriate questions people ask when they are listening to someone for the purpose of giving advice. These questions are conversation stoppers. The function these questions have is to point out, in a candid way, a means of seeking your own personal opinion, and what you end up doing is asking a question that really stops the conversation cold. To give two examples, one of the things people often say when asked to listen is, 'Do you know what I'd do?' The minute you say that to someone who wants to tell you what has happened to them they feel you haven't really listened. They feel you don't understand the uniqueness of their situation and that you only want to talk about yourself. Sometimes that will stop the conversation immediately. What you should do is listen in someone else's terms. Try to listen to how they are valuing the situation, how they are making sense out of it, and reflect back to them their thoughts and feelings in their own terms, and maybe much later in the conversation ask them, 'Do you want to know what I'd do?' But to have that be the first thing out of your mouth often really stops them cold. Another thing that people do so often is to tell each other 'not to take it so seriously.' It's interesting because even though I really prescribe humor in all sorts of situations, I never say to anyone who is very upset, 'Oh come on, can't you see the funny side of this?' That should never be the first thing you say to someone, or 'come on, lighten up.' This functions the same way — the person feels as though you don't see their feelings as being valid; 'you don't understand my situation;

how could you possibly understand?' All they are going to do is up the ante and start talking a little more florid in terms about why their situation is so earth-stopping. Somewhere again, later in the conversation, after you have discussed the situation in their terms, say, 'Can you see the fun piece in this?' or 'Some day we can laugh at this,' but do not do this when first approached until the seriousness of the situation has been assessed. Those are two things that I would try to avoid in advising. Unless it's clearly an advising role, most people don't really want advice; they just want someone to hear it all. They want to hear themselves think out loud in the presence of someone who cares about them. Probably one of the greatest gifts that a friend can give is just to let someone think out loud in front of you. Don't judge them, and don't jump in and offer immediate advice and tell them what you would do, or did do, when you were in a similar circumstance.

Q. *You suggest 'paraphrasing' when one acts as a listener or sounding board for another person. Is paraphrasing used to get the person to continue their discussion or does it signal 'yes, I understand what you are saying?' What exactly is the purpose of paraphrasing?*

A. You can have both of those purposes. I think the most important purpose is to communicate at every level, 'Go ahead, I'm listening. Tell me about it. I'm not going to judge you — I'm not going to tell you what to do, I'm just listening. Explain it to me and tell me how it seems to you.' While I think it encourages people to go on, it also tends to encourage people to resolve their own problems. Paraphrasing is a technique developed through the counseling profession. Counselors had people begin talking about their problems and unravel them. [The people] started to reknit them on their own by having someone listen carefully to them and paraphrase what they were saying. Paraphrasing is a kind of 'let me look at you' situation and reflect upon it.

Q. *In your speech, you stressed the advisability and necessity of communicating about the day's activities very soon after a person arrived home from work rather than waiting until late evening or night. Why is it important we relate to our spouses fairly quickly about our day's activities? What are we accomplishing by that early transition?*

A. I would amend that slightly to say the first thing you want to convey is how glad you are to see them so that it is a kind and warm greeting. Beyond that, I think it's best as a way of previewing the evening. If you get together with a friend (spouse, etc.), it lets you know fairly early in the evening what kind of day they've had. Let's say it's been sliding towards the negative side. This gives you, as a person who is with them, some sense of how to manage the rest of the evening. Maybe this isn't the best night to talk about the Visa credit bill or whatever it is you might have originally wanted to discuss. It gives you a chance to read a kind of environmental impact statement that says 'here's what I'm coming home with.'

So finding out, for example, that your partner had a very exhilarating day or that the friend you have gotten together with for dinner may have had a **wonderful** day . . . gives you an expectation for the kind of evening ahead. So I think getting that out of the way early is a good idea. I have also seen the early transition work successfully for couples who have children. The parents greeted each other, attended to the kids, got the dinner on the table, got the kids to bed, and then they had their special time in the evening, which included both talking about work and talking about 'us,' meaning a much more intimate relationship in their conversations. My preference is to get it out of the way and then you can remind yourself of your life that you have and you want to talk about it.

Q. *It would seem the earlier the job-oriented discussion takes place, it would complete the 'work-to-home' transition much more quick-*

ly and allow you to, let's say, relax and basically tell the workday goodbye and allow one to start on family oriented activities. Is that the case?

A. That seems to be a personal preference of mine. It's like after I've explained my day to my husband, then I go, 'OK, let's put that away and put it out with the dog or something like that; let's just forget about that topic now.'

Q. *What is the special significance you attach to changing clothes upon returning home after work?*

A. There is an expression I borrowed from my father-in-law: 'turning in the suit.' He and his friends, retired executives, used that expression to refer to people who had retired. But I think you can retire on a daily basis. It's a transformational act. I mean you talk about closing ceremonies for people. It's a ceremonial 'letting go of the day.' Whatever clothing people work in, the act of changing into something else is a very visual representation saying, 'I'm done with this portion of the day and I'm starting with this new one.' Nine out of ten people I talk to say the first thing they do when they get home is change their clothes. If there is anything people do to leave work behind, it is change from their suit into a pair of sweats. That accomplishes a shedding of the day. It's a different image.

Q. *You suggest that individuals may have two groups of 'friends.' Let's call these a professional group and a personal or social group. You appear to suggest that one maintain these two groups separately, and you caution individuals not to allow these groups to coincide often, if at all. What are the purposes of those recommendations?*

A. Rather than saying 'two sets of friends,' what we would say are two distinct kinds of support groups or support networks. Everyone needs a support group at work you

can trust and collaborate with. What everyone also needs outside of work are people whose professional outcomes have nothing to do with yours. That's the reason why I think business and friendships don't mix. There are times in professional circumstances where that line has to be drawn. If that's complicated by a loving friendship or another kind of intimacy, **that** is the real problem. I encourage people to have both kinds of support systems in their life. They both are very rich support systems. One is not preferable to the other. I think both are absolutely necessary. I caution and I ask people if your five closest personal support people are all in either your professional network or are all outside of it, then something is probably out of balance. You need both groups. If your five closest friends are both co-workers and close friends, I think there is too much intermingling and this may lead to problems both in impression management, which is something you always want to do on a professional level, and in a friendship, where you never want to manage impressions. You simply don't want nor should you have to manage your impression with your friends. That's a time to be intimate and to be 'yourself' in a way that's vulnerable and open and [and to be able to] say things like 'business is terrible.' These are things that you would never say to most people or to a professional colleague. There are exceptions to these rules, but in general that's what I believe works best.

Q. *As a professional counselor, do you generally follow this advice of maintaining two separate support groups?*

A. Yes, I don't have any close personal friends who are professional colleagues. However, I have a very close friend that I met in a professional circumstance. This is a psychiatrist I did co-therapy with, but we haven't worked together since. I have a tendency to just go fishing in another barrel for friends. I feel very strongly about that. You can't talk shop very much with friends who don't know you from work because they are not interested. I find that a

great protective device because you can talk about all sorts of wonderful, interesting things such as politics and music or all the other things that are going on. I have a strong preference for that, both in my own life and with the professional people I work with.

Q. *Home entertainment of guests is a very common social function. I thought your advice to businesspersons and their spouses was invaluable. You said: 'What are a few crumbs among friends?' What are some hints for having an enjoyable evening with 'friends'?*

A. I think the most important part is to rid ourselves of the idea of having to do anything for 'company' if the company are our close friends. However, if you are having a business client dinner, you **have** to fuss or get it catered. You want it to be elegant and you want it to be right, but let's leave that aside for a moment. We're talking about dinner with friends. When having dinner with friends, the focus is on conversation. The focus is on spending time together. All these preparatory things have to go out the window, such as meticulous cleaning and the extravagant cooking for company. I really encourage people to keep it simple. If you've got to get a pizza and it's going to be your only chance to talk with your friends all week, that is going to be the best pizza you have ever had because the conversation will be delicious. Conversation is what we recount when we gather with friends. These crazy elaborate dinners that working people try and make for each other are ridiculous. You will look over at the hosts and they look like absolute zombies. I don't know if you have ever been to a dinner like that, but you just know this dinner has been forty-eight hours in the making. It takes twenty-five minutes to eat, and the hosts are not participating in the conversation because they're just bleary-eyed. For people to spend some enjoyable time together, the entertainment may be very simple. More and more, I've seen people invite each other over for dessert. You can pick up dessert and everyone can make coffee, but

the real point is that you can see each other. Too many people are not getting together because they feel they don't have time to put together some elaborate entertainment and that is just nonsense. With so many people working, I think it is going to be more important to make these things simple or buy them somewhere else. Someone had a dinner party in my honor when my book was first published about two years ago. She had just started a new job, and I guess she ordered everything to go. Appropriately, one of our toasts was 'gourmet to go' or we would have never had this dinner together because nobody could have done it. Everyone was too busy. I assume, of course, that everyone's mate helps — I must assume that. We're not talking about women making dinner. We are talking about partners making dinner together.

Q. *You urge professionals not to give business advice at various social functions, such as a tax accountant at a Christmas party or a physician at a football game. What are some diplomatic means of avoiding that situation?*

A. I think you have to make a joke out of it. Tone is very important. You cannot be sarcastic. You have to say something like, 'Gosh, I left my calculator on my desk' or something I often say, 'Gee, that's an interesting question, but I'm off duty tonight.' A lot of times I say, 'Gee, I'm just here for the punch' or make some kind of a joke to let the other person know in a warm and friendly way that you are here for the party and they can call you Monday morning. Perhaps you may say that you are taking tonight off for good behavior. Be very firm about it, but be friendly, and then just let it go. You may have to do it twice because sometimes people persist. Once you start giving professional advice at a party, you start thinking about those folders that are sitting on your desk that you never did get to on Thursday or Friday. If you do this, you've lost the opportunity to relax. I think it's real important not to discuss business at a social function.

Q. *Let us consider working parents with school-age children that must be picked up each day. Doesn't this complicate the 'winding down' process because the children require immediate satisfaction when they get into the automobile? How may parents accommodate their children and also leave their work at the office?*

A. Parents have to do the transitional activities quickly, especially when picking up a child at day care. I think a lot of families should do some unwinding things together. Lots of moms and dads have good cassette tapes in the car. It may be ocean sounds or music the family sings together on the way home. So many parents have told me that just seeing their child is a reminder of life after work, and hearing about the earth-shattering events on the playground is just a wonderful way of getting out of their own professional world. For lots of parents, being brought into a child's world, if they listen to their children, is a great way of leaving the office behind. Right before they pick up their child, parents should picture that child, picture their day and what it must have been like, and allow time to reconnect the feelings for that child before you see them so it's not so abrupt. The parents have to do these things much more quickly than anyone else because they are not just shifting from the role of secular worker. They are shifting into another job as parents, as organizers of the home, and all those other kinds of things that happen at home.

Q. *Do you think parents should explain the transitional process they are going through to get the child's cooperation and understanding?*

A. Absolutely. In fact, I'm glad you asked that. Someone recently told me a great story about a working mom. She finally had to do this with her kids. She said, "when I come home, I will say hello to you, tell you I love you, and then I have to go upstairs for fifteen minutes." At

first, the children were really upset . . . they felt, 'We're losing Mom!' Now, she'll come in, kiss them hello, go upstairs, and when she comes downstairs fifteen minutes later, the kids will say, 'Mom's back!' Now that is her family ritual. After a number of years, she was able to change the way she came home from work. I really encourage families to get their own rituals. Whether it's taking a family walk around the block, or doing aerobics together, or one of the parents just saying, 'Boy, I'm glad to see you, but this is what I have to do so we can have fun together tonight.' At first, the kids will fight it and they'll whine or whatever, but they will get used to it. They will accept it, especially since they see how different a parent is when they return — from the dead — after ten or fifteen minutes of doing whatever they do. This may be soaking their feet, watching the news, just spending some time alone, or even spending that time with your partner. Some couples say they set a clock for fifteen minutes when they first come home just so they can spend that time alone. The kids **knew** when the clock went off they could all get together again. Families work it out.

Q. *When working with an accounting firm this summer, I noticed one partner's secretary called her children about 4:30 and talked for several minutes if time permitted. Is this a form of "winding down" or "previewing" for both the child and the parent that aids the transitional process? Is that something you would recommend?*

A. Yes, lots of parents try to preview the evening. Parents and spouses, partners in the home, call each other toward the end of the day, saying, 'I'm looking forward to being with you.' Parents, particularly with children who return to a home alone and even those children who are home with some kind of day caretaker or sitter, may preview the evening. Mom or Dad will call and say, 'Hi, Honey, what are you having for a snack?' Again, this is an opportunity to reconnect with the good feelings that you want to share when you get home.

Q. *We practice 'time management' at our secular work as adults. Can time management also be applied to or by children so they understand the value of time and the importance of scheduling and setting priorities?*

A. Yes, I think we have to. I think it's something very important to pass on to them. Mostly it is the sense of how long things take and what items and duties are most important to you. Basically, the things we learn as adults in time management are 'How long will it take?' 'Can I fit it in?' and 'If I can't fit everything in, what's the most important thing for me to be doing right now?' I talk to children about their priorities on a Saturday afternoon. One wants to get his shoes fixed, go to the movies, and visit a friend. You explain it will take 45 minutes to do this, and two hours to do that, and we've got two hours available. Which one do you want to do? I think we must impart to children at a very early age a sense of making decisions and a sense of selecting things that are important. This also lets children understand that Mom and Dad don't have an infinite amount of time. To make this point of priorities, we as parents should sort of kick in that 'Your Dad and I are going to take a champagne bubble bath and we'll see you in an hour.' The children get the sense that I have my time alone, or if a couple is involved, we need our time together, and **then** we have our time with **you**. These principles of time management are real important for families.

Q. *Some parents, no doubt, feel guilty about the lack of time spent with their children. How can a parent analyze the true source of this guilt and eliminate or control it?*

A. I think adults have to look at where they developed their expectations for what **is** a good parent. Is it what your parents told you when you were growing up? Ask yourself: When I was a child, who did I see that I felt was a pretty good parent? What was on your little list as a child

that made you say, 'When I'm a parent, I'll never do this.' A good thing to realize is some recent research shows that most parents spend an average of fifteen minutes of quality time with their kids daily, even if they are home with them all day, or whether they work all day and come home in the evening. Quality time is defined by 'one-to-one interaction.' Something like reading a story, practicing new words, playing a game, or putting together a puzzle are examples of one-on-one activities with a child. For working parents, the important thing to realize is that just because some parents were home all day with their child, doesn't necessarily mean that quality time was spent. I think that guilt goes out the window when parents realize, 'All right, I'm just here for a couple of hours in the evening, but I'm going to spend half an hour or forty-five minutes with my child and that time is going to be very intense and of intimate quality.' If you do this, you are **far above** the national average, and I think that kind of statistic can be really helpful for any guilty parents walking around.

Q. *As working parents, sometimes it is difficult to open a dialogue with children. What is the best way to ask a question to ensure that communication can be started and maintained?*

A. Earlier, we talked about paraphrasing. I think it is really important to ask a question on their own terms. It's best to start with a general question: 'How was your day?' If that doesn't go very far, then you have to start fishing a little bit. Try to use the language your kids are using depending upon their age. You might ask 'Was it kind of a bummer today?' or whatever the expression is the kids are using these days. I think it is also helpful to volunteer a few things about your day, but not too many, because you don't want to overwhelm a child. You might say, 'My day was kind of half and half, too.'

Q. *So an open-ended or essay-type question versus a 'yes/no' or 'true/false' response-type question is best?*

A. Yes, you don't want to say, 'Did you take your English exam?' Instead, asking, 'How was your English exam?' is much better. 'What was the exam like,' versus 'Was it hard or easy?' Hard or easy may be answered with one word while 'What was it like?' or 'What did it cover?' might take a little longer. You want to start with something that is going to keep the conversation going, but always understand, particularly from age twelve on, children may not want to talk to you very much and they **are entitled** to some privacy.

Q. *Let's change the subject to individuals that have offices in their home. This must present a difficult situation for these persons to leave their workplace behind when it's so close to them. How do you suggest these people close their day?*

A. Let's just say two things. First, I think it would be important that you work in a completely separate space from your living quarters so when you leave in the evening, you have something like a closing ceremony where you shut your office door with a lock and key. Maybe you could use a deadbolt so when you try to go back in later that night you are forcefully reminded you are about to work overtime. The second thing to do when you work at home is to leave your **office** at the end of the day and come back **home**. I don't care what you do when you leave. Take a walk, go to the grocery store, pick up something at the cleaners, or go have a Coke at a cafe, but do something so that you leave the 'office' and come 'home' again. When you return home, you are not at work anymore. You are coming home like every working professional; somehow, it simulates the more common process of most people who work in office buildings. After you've worked at home and then leave for a while, the ideal break between working and home is the exercise routine. When you come home after exercising, you are back to enjoy your home and **not** to work in your **home office**.

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Q. ■ *Individuals (spouses) that share the same career (e.g., actors, lawyers, academics, accountants) are obviously going to have disagreements at work and then they must come home together. How do you suggest these couples handle their unique situations so they don't carry work-related problems into their personal life?*

A. ■ It's hard to eliminate whatever strife comes up when people work together, but I think the most important thing is to settle it when you first get home. Some couples have institutionalized that by having a little good and welfare dialogue at the end of the day. Then whatever feelings there are about the person in their professional role, viz-a-viz each other, those are taken care of before they move into the role of true partners, as husband and wife or whatever their particular situation. If I could just quote someone at our meeting today. She said: 'Couples who work together should have a time limit about discussing work.' It is very arbitrary, something like 'We don't talk about work after 8:00 p.m. and that's a rule!' Also in our meeting we were joking that 'we never talk about work in the bedroom.' That is simply a subject that is verboten. We can talk about work in the living room, dining room, or kitchen, but we must have at least one room in the house where we cannot talk about work, and frankly, that might as well be the bedroom since you live and work together. Couples have to drop those secular lines; otherwise, they will talk about work all the time and all the interest that brought them together in the first place will be lost. There cannot be an intimate relationship that is totally based on work. It will not be sustained. It won't flourish or grow.

Q. ■ *How can working single persons or single parents develop an active social life apart from work*

since many of their acquaintances are from their work environment? How can they make the transition and leave the office behind?

A. ■ I think it's really a question of thinking back to the interests they may have had at a younger age before they intensified their professional training. They must go to places where people are doing those activities that interested them before their careers took off. They may enjoy music, going to concerts alone, or joining friends at the symphony. If it's hiking or fishing, they must go to groups doing the activities that they would enjoy. I don't believe in contrived sorts of meetings like going to a bar. However, going to parties with friends that you already know can be helpful. I think the most important thing is just do the things that you enjoy. If you're not sure what you enjoy, then do everything and find out whether you enjoy it or not. Sit down with the Sunday paper. Every major city paper has an 'entertainment section' listing events. You may go to every event that sounds marginally interesting to you and figure out what you enjoy doing. When you begin to attend the things that you really do enjoy doing, the likelihood of meeting someone who also enjoys those activities and who will become a friend — the same sex or the opposite sex — will multiply. Whether it's going to an art gallery, the opening of a concert, or Democrats for Mr. X, that is where you'll meet the people you will have something in common with.

Q. ■ *Why did you write the book **Leaving the Office Behind**? What was your inspiration?*

A. ■ I was teaching stress prevention to business and industry and conducting seminars for a company and several professional organizations. People kept on saying, 'We're pretty good about stress management at work, but the problem is

I'm fine until I get home,' or 'I'm fine at the job, but I can't sleep at night or I wake up in the middle of the night.'

I began to realize that unless we also taught people how to protect their private lives, all the money, those millions of dollars that businesses were putting into stress preventative training, wasn't going to work. What really had to happen was not only do people have to manage stress during the day, but they had to renew themselves in the hours after work. *Leaving The Office Behind* is the other piece of the total stress prevention picture. From a business point of view, it's really interesting because more people are reading the book and I get more and more requests to come and talk about the total picture. Finally, these companies that are spending large sums of money are realizing that what goes on in the hours **after** work affects how people are when they show up at the office at 8:00 a.m. — either **sharp** or **dull**. I also wrote it because I was really getting very weary of these books for men and women about 'having it all.' This was just an absurd notion. It seemed one really wanted to 'have it all,' but everyone was getting sorted to do this and urged to do that. Instead, I thought what we really need to do is make smoother transitions between different parts of our life and that's about as good as it is going to get. I am hoping we can be more graceful about how we make the transition from work to home. I don't mean to imply that you are going to be the President of a Fortune 500 company during the day and also the Brownie or Boy Scout Leader and a professional dancer on the side. People didn't really want to do those things, so I think this is a response to all that literature of being super people, which I think is nonsense and is **very stressful**. ☺

*Dr. Mackoff, on behalf of **The Woman CPA**, I want to thank you for your interview on **Leaving the Office Behind**.*