

A change is as good as a rest?

BY GED BAILES

ANOTHER Saturday and I'm not the 'lucky winner with a jackpot estimated at just over £11 million'. It annoys me when I hear 'wouldn't want to win the Lottery, all that money will change your life'. Excuse me, isn't that the general idea? So what advice can this month's press cuttings offer?

I won't get 'sudden wealth syndrome' (*Gloucestershire Echo, Gloucester Citizen*). Californian psychologists, Stephen Goldbart and Joan Di Furia, counsel dotcomers and others who attain instant wealth. They describe anxiety among clients, characterised by feelings they did not deserve, or were embarrassed by, their wealth. When defining a meaningful, productive life, they suggest 'victory isn't the size of your bank account'. Perhaps not, but defeat is definitely associated with your overdraft.

To explain 'success depression,' Steven Berglas, an American management specialist, describes 'supernova burnout', where people pursue success believing it will change their lives only to discover it rarely does (*Financial Times*). He suggests that tycoons involved in criminal or illicit affairs are unable to admit that living the good life is really 'psychological purgatory'. Their illegal excitement compensates for boring daily routines and a need to continue taking risks.

Change of job

Occupational psychologist Colin Selby believes employers must think laterally and adapt to today's culture of career changers (*The Independent on Sunday*). The article quotes a recruitment company survey that found 82 per cent of UK professionals would consider changing careers within five years, but were unlikely to do so because they feared having to start again at the bottom of the ladder.

In contrast, a survey of 30,000 workers by Professor Andrew Oswald of Warwick University concluded that most enjoyed a high degree of job satisfaction, despite increasing levels of workplace stress (*Walthamstow Guardian*). In a lovely quote, he compared working in Britain with playing for the England football team: 'Things are getting worse and worse out there, but it's still much more fun than being on the bench.'

One headline (in Glasgow's *Sunday*

Herald) said going to work could be better than sex. This got me thinking... where is this place, are there vacancies? The article suggests work is an intrinsic, positive aspect of life. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *Flow – The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, equates happiness with absorption, claiming this is more likely to be achieved at work, not whilst creosoting the fence on Sunday afternoon. Although put the *EastEnders* omnibus into the equation and there's no contest.



Professor Stephen Palmer, in an article on the tendency to pathologise and exaggerate work-related stress, suggests moving up the career ladder can lead to an increased sense of being in control, which improves mental and physical health (*Basingstoke Gazette*).

Peter Herriott, an occupational psychologist, and Cliff Arnall, a motivational psychologist, offer good ideas to help manage work stress and improve efficiency (*The Guardian*). I was particularly drawn to: working out what your employer expects of you; learning how the organisation works; taking breaks and setting limits on your working day. However, working in the NHS, I chose an easier question: Is there a God?

Change of scenery

A survey of 1008 adults, for a low-cost airline, concluded nearly 30 per cent of Britons would rather live abroad (*Daily Star, Metro Midlands* and others). Feeling 'trapped' was greatest in the North East, where 60 per cent said the weather caused them to holiday abroad. Psychologist Susan Quilliam recommends regular short breaks in the sun to refresh and revitalise.

To really get away, the Barnden family from Bexhill-on-Sea are moving to Bardsey Island off the coast of North

Wales. Judy Hutchings, Bangor University, said the urge to escape the pressures of our modern world and its hi-tech helplessness was common and understandable (Welsh and Liverpool editions of the *Daily Post*). She emphasised the adaptability of determined humans and our ability to cope with huge changes, so good luck to the Barndens.

Personal changes

To help my relationship I could change my bed. Psychologist David Lewis, in a Sleep Council survey, concluded that couples with beds less than two years old were more likely to chat, share intimate secrets and feel more relaxed and secure (*Morpeth Herald*). But I wonder if the newly bought condition of the bed correlates with the initial enthusiasm and novelty of the relationship?

I could take the advice of Ben Renshaw and Robert Holden, psychologists with the Happiness Project. Apparently, a good giggle releases endorphins to make us feel happier, reduces tension and blood pressure, improves circulation and boosts your immune system (*The Independent on Sunday*). Dr Jason Goodson (Utah University) reports exposure to a dose of stand-up comedy had a positive effect on depressed patients (*Daily Mail, The Independent*).

Maybe I should just keep calm about the injustice of not winning the Lottery? John Prescott's egg-induced seizure activity evoked articles on anger management. Psychotherapist Gael Lindenfield suggests beating a cushion or door. She advises me to screw my face up, let my 'throat growl' and 'scream out abuse' at an empty chair or deserted field. Psychologist Brad Bushman disagrees, saying this will make matters worse (*Girl About Town*). Gareth Hughes, Kneesworth House Hospital, advises me to ask what I am getting so upset about (*The Guardian, Glasgow Evening Times*). After seeing my face in the mirror, he's right, I laugh and feel better already. Now where's that scratchcard?

■ *Ged Bailes is Consultant Forensic Psychologist at the Norvic Clinic, Norwich, and is a member of the Society's Press Committee. Co-ordinating Editor is Professor Pam Briggs.*