

## RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Oh, just look at them . . . isn't this a heart-warming scene? You can see the connection between them. Do you remember the feelings those happy moments bring? In healthy relationships, people feel safe, respected, and accepted for who they are. Most lasting relationships begin this way.

Sometimes, relationships that begin well are left to simply deteriorate over time. Relationships must be maintained, similar to the regular maintenance we do to keep our houses and lawns in top form. Pipeliners know the regular maintenance that's required to keep the flow of product moving with maximum efficiency. In the same way, each of us must pay attention, ask questions, make adjustments, and stay attentive to the well-being of our relationships in order to keep them healthy and moving forward.

Men and women who do shift work tend to find the maintenance of relationships a great challenge. A shift worker's non-traditional schedule has them sleeping in patterns that are different from their family and friends, and the fact that their schedule is rotating can complicate matters even more. Shift workers often work weekends and holidays when others are enjoying the freedom of off-duty activities. This type of schedule can certainly add an element of complexity to the already complex topic of investing in relationships.

Healthy relationships have the added benefit of allowing those involved to enjoy better health, but in unhealthy relationships people may feel anxious, confused, uncertain and even unsafe. Rarely does a person sleep well when they're feeling anxious and distracted by relational woes. The immune system is strengthened during sleep, so without quality deep sleep; we may find ourselves more vulnerable to illness and chronic fatigue. Long-term strife is also known to lead to increased blood pressure and blood sugar levels, and that leads to a greater danger – the risk for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

Shift workers can be proactive by taking the February calendar and inviting their spouse, family, and/or friends to form a plan for the month. Discuss and write down what your work and sleep schedule will be. Add to that, important events that you'll be available to participate in. Proactive shift workers can build relationships by following up with their significant others on how things went if they were unable to be there in person. When the obligatory dates and times are set, find opportunities to schedule at least one date night. To build healthy relationships, quality time must be spent together. Plan for it!

There are many small ways a busy shift worker can contribute to his or her relationship "accounts". Do you know your significant other's preferences? Find out what they are and act on them. Maybe she would be delighted to have flowers delivered to her office. Is there a task you can do that will help the other person? Maybe he would like to find a sweet note tucked into his coat pocket. Even a phone call received in the middle of the day just to say, "I'm thinking of you" can go a long way toward building or maintaining a relationship.

What would bring a smile to that person's face today? Got it? Be proactive, take some active steps forward, and just do it!

