

Editor's notes:

May 2010, Volume 24-9

The origin of this month's name dates back to the Latin words "Maius" and "Maiia" -- Roman male and female deities representing magnitude or bigness, possibly a reference to the prime growing season, of which May is a part, for plants and spring-born animals in the northern hemisphere.

The ancient Greeks held a festival for Cybele, the mythical mother of many Greek gods, during the spring. The Romans dedicated a holiday called Matronalia to the goddess Juno, mother of Mars, Minerva, and Vulcan. Gifts to one's real mother were common that day.

"Mothering Sunday" in Europe and the British Isles honoured mothers and motherhood on a specific Sunday. The Catholic liturgical calendar marked the fourth Sunday of Lent to honour the Virgin Mary and "mother church," and families offered token gifts and took charge of traditionally female tasks such as cooking and cleaning for the day.

Today Mother's Day is a big business. Greeting cards, flowers, perfume, jewelry and dining out are all a big part of how we express appreciation to the women who raised us.

Here are a few dates to celebrate this month:

May Day, May 1 -- This day was celebrated in olden times to mark the transition from the colder to the warmer season. It has been observed for centuries in various ways.

The most famous May Day tradition is that of putting up a May pole, originally a live tree brought to the village to commemorate the beginning of summer. Townspeople would also forage in the woods for greenery to decorate their homes.

Kentucky Derby, May 1 -- This historic race, which originated in 1875, is always held on the first Saturday in May. This first leg of the Triple Crown is also known as the "Run for the Roses" because the winning horse is draped in a garland of 500 red roses.

V-E Day, May 8 -- This is the 65th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day which commemorates the unconditional surrender of Germany to the Allied forces in 1945.

Mother's Day, May 9 -- This day is always observed on the second Sunday in May. Make the time to honour all the special mothers in your life.

Limerick Day, May 12 -- This day honours the birthday of one of its champions, Edward Lear. The limerick is one of the verse forms indigenous to the English language. Traditional limericks are five lines of rhyming verse:

*There was a young poet named Lear
Who said, it is just as I fear
Five lines are enough
For this kind of stuff*

Make a limerick each day of the year.

The Canadian Tulip Festival, May 7 - 24 -- This year is a special celebration because it marks the 65th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by Canadian troops in 1945. The festival itself originated in 1953 with a gift of 100,000 tulip bulbs from the Dutch Royal Family as a thank-you gift for providing them with a refuge in World War II during exile from the Nazis.

Ottawa, the site of the Festival, will host more than half a million people who come from all over to view the 3 million tulips in bloom. In addition, there are numerous floats, parades, floral sculptures, and fireworks.

Victoria Day, May 24 -- Sometimes referred to as Firecracker Day, this observance celebrates Queen Victoria who was born on May 24 in Great Britain in 1819. This long weekend also marks the unofficial start of summer because many cottagers use this opportunity to open up their cottages for the season. Young partiers often call this their 2 - 4 weekend, a reference to the number of beers in a case.

Better Sleep Month -- Sleep is essential to a healthy life, but 95 percent of Americans report difficulty sleeping at some time in their lives. Infants require 12-14 hours of sleep, whereas seniors may require only 6-8 hours. For tips on getting the sleep you need, go to www.medicinenet.com/sleep/article.

Play some music -- it's good for you: Music may have charms to sooth a savage breast, as William Congreve wrote, but can it make us healthier? Maybe -- but don't cue the orchestra just yet.

Health.com reports that Dr. Michael Miller, a professor of medicine and director of the Center for Preventive Cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore, has observed that listeing to "joyful" music can improve a person's blood flow, which may promote vascular health.

Music can also trigger endorphins (or similar compounds) within the brain to release nitric oxide, which makes blood vessels dilate, reduces inflammation, stops platelets from sticking, and may lower cholesterol.

Music is also known to relieve stress, which generally results in better health overall.

How well do you juggle? Stay sane when multitasking

Like it or not, multitasking seems to be the wave of the future. Technology, along with staffing cutbacks, is making it possible -- and necessary -- for all of us to do more than one job at a time. Instead of fighting it, remember that flexibility and higher productivity usually increase your employability. When multitasking, remember this basic advice:

Get clear objectives. Ask your manager how your different tasks will be measured. Find out what your deadlines are. Juggling too many projects indefinitely can lead to confusion and burnout.

Focus on your core competency. Multitasking may require you to learn new skills. Challenge is good, but don't lose track of what you already do best. Exercising your established skills will help you maintain self-confidence and minimize stress.

Don't overdo it. If you stretch yourself too thin with too many different tasks, you'll wear yourself out physically and mentally. Be aware of your limits and apply some balance to stay sane.

Keeping up with today's workplace buzzwords

Business is full of jargon and buzzwords. Here are a few contemporary terms that describe the workplace as it is, not as an idealized vision of productive contentment:

- **Digital nomads:** Workers able to be productive in any location due to their mastery of wireless technology.
- **Goldman-sacked:** A massive layoff, similar to the firings in the financial sector during the economic meltdown of 2008.
- **Ohnosecond:** The fraction of a second between hitting "send" and realizing that you've just fired off an embarrassing e-mail to your boss -- or your entire company.
- **Bosshole:** A manager who's a . . . jerk.
- **Ramen-profitable:** A business that's just scraping by, like a college student living on an endless diet of ramen.
- **Trep:** Abbreviation of "entrepreneur" for those too cool to use multisyllabic words.

Hold a brainstorming session all by yourself

You can't always call a meeting of your colleagues or employees to brainstorm ideas. Sometimes you've got to generate solutions or options on your own. Here are a few techniques to get your brain into a creative mode:

- **Time machine** -- Imagine you're facing the same problem or situation 100 years ago. What would your alternatives look like? Or send yourself 100 years into the future: What tools might be available for your use? Can you create them now?

- **Reversal** -- Turn your problem around for a fresh perspective. Think about what a reasonable person would do with the situation, and consider what would happen if you tried the exact opposite.

- **Gap analysis** -- Look at where you are and where you want to be. What steps are missing between those two points? Identify what would bridge the gap.

- **Free writing** - Sit down at the computer and start writing about the problem. Don't censor yourself: Put down anything that comes into your mind, regardless of how alien to the topic it seems. After 15 minutes, take a look at what you've written. Much of it may be unusable, but you could find a good idea or two hidden in your words.

Proactive may be good, but reactive may be faster

In old Western movies, the good guy never shoots first. Usually the fellow in the black hat draws his gun -- and then gets cut down by a faster shot.

That's the movies; however, some scientists think that there's some validity to the notion that we react faster than we act.

In a series of experiments (set up as simulated gunfights) testing reaction speed, volunteers tended to move about 10 percent faster -- approximately 21 milliseconds -- when they were reacting to a partner's movement than when they were initiating an action. Twenty-one milliseconds isn't much, but it may be enough to dodge an oncoming car or a charging lion.

Although the reactive volunteers were faster, they were less accurate than their opponents -- meaning that maybe the good guy should have drawn first.

My mother died a few days after her 88th birthday, in 2002. I have often said that I must have seemed like an alien child to her, we were different in so many ways. But her entrepreneurial spirit, her sense of fair play, her highest ethical standards and her love of writing and music all live on in me. Often, when I write a paragraph that I particularly like, or a new song that pleases me, I wish I could read or play each to my mother.

We are all born, live our lives, then die. What we make of ourselves is up to us. How we are remembered by our children is also up to us. My mother was a great example and I remember her still.

Happy Mothers Day to all the moms out there!

-- Siegfried Pedde, President, Helix Courier Limited