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The latest work/life balance benchmarking survey shows that three out of four Australian organisations are struggling to find a balance between work and personal life for their employees. 77% of respondents reported that work/life efforts in their organisation were hindered by increased work demands overshadowing personal needs.

Only 28% of organisations said they had developed a work environment where employees plan and manage their own work schedules so as to be able to manage their lifestyle demands. In organisations that have not developed work/life policies and programs 60% say they have observed an increase in employee

dissatisfaction as a result of the inability to achieve and balance their work and lifestyle responsibilities.

The survey examined initiatives that employers have taken to help workers balance work and personal life, and the impact these initiatives have had on

workers and the organisation. An increase in staff turnover as a result of lack of flexible work practices was reported by 21% of organisations overall. Organisations regarded as Best Practice experienced no increase in such turnover at all.

**PRIMITIVE STREAK**

When is the most important time of your life? Birth, leaving home, marriage, death? None of these according to British biologist Lewis Wolpert, who singles out a time two weeks or so after the sperm fuses with the egg, when a groove forms on the surface of the growing human embryo—the primitive streak.

Why is it so crucial? The primitive streak is an outward sign of a massive re-organisation of the embryo from a sphere into a multi-layered organism, in a process called gastrulation. It marks the establishment of the body plan of the future fetus. When

the streak is fully developed it thickens at the end to form a structure called Henson's node, which produces chemicals that trigger the formation of the nervous system. It is also a marker for individuality: if the fertilised egg turns into twins, this almost always happens before the primitive streak forms.

The primitive streak marks a major milestone in the development of the embryo, but it's not only of interest to biologists. It's central to the debate about when human life begins, and has profound ethical and politi-

cal implications, dictating the time limit for experiments on human embryos in many countries. For example, the UK's Human Fertilisation and Embryology (HFE) Act, which came into force in 1990 dictates that no embryo can be stored or used after the primitive streak appears, 14 days after fertilization. Most other industrialized nations that allow embryo research have adopted the same 14-day time limit (in the US only a few states allow any kind of embryo research).

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THIS WEEK 32 YEARS AGO

The push-button telephone that is about to enter service has demanded a completely new technology that may one day turn it into a domestic computer terminal.

Looking exactly like a conventional instrument, except for its 10-button keypad in place of the rotary dial, it is being sold to the public as “the phone with the modern touch”. And while it will set up a call no quicker than a conventional dial, because of the drawbacks of electromechanical telephone exchanges, the keypad will allow numbers to be entered much more quickly (typically 5 seconds for a 10-digit number, compared with 14 seconds using a disc dial).

What the public is not yet aware of is the mind-boggling revolution in telephone development it has started. By the end of the decade, the button dial will be ideally suited to the high speed switching that the new generation of electronic telephone exchanges will make available, and quite different type of telephone signaling technique will have begun to enter public service. Known as multi-frequency (MF) this also offers the first chance to use the ordinary telephone as a data-input service. Then the possibilities for entirely new subscriber services are almost endless.

The ultimate would be a full teletype system with a visual display until that could

adopt the full alphanumeric keyboard of a typewriter. Linked to an MF telephone, this could be used not only to key in complicated statements to a computerized database, but also to send letters over the phone lines at up to 15 characters per second.



EASIER ALTERNATIVE TO REHAB FOR ALCOHOLICS



Alcoholics may no longer have to spend weeks in rehab to get sober. In the largest study of its kind, researchers have found

that alcoholism can be treated successfully with just nine 20-minute sessions with the family GP together with either the drug naltrexone or specialised counselling. The trial included 1383 alcohol-dependent patients who recently abstained from drinking, and the results were published this week in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Two drugs were tested—naltrexone, which reduces alcohol cravings and acamprosate, the newest treatment for alcoholism. Researchers also tested two types of therapy—combined behaviour intervention

(CBI), a 50-minute specialised counselling session and medical management (MM), during which a doctor reviewed the patient’s diagnosis, recommended that they stop drinking, and dispensed the drugs. Treatments were given for 16 weeks and patients were assessed for up to one year. During treatment, patients received naltrexone plus MM, CBI plus MM and placebo tablets, or naltrexone and CBI plus MM had higher percentages of alcohol free days (80.6, 79.2, 77.1 respectively) than those receiving placebo tablets and MM only (75.1)

TREATMENT TO HELP PHOBIAS

Whether you’re scared of spiders or public speaking, a new study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences suggests that treatment with the hormone cortisone could help.

Researchers recruited 40 people with social phobia and 20 with spider phobia, and gave them either cortisone or an inactive placebo. There was a one-hour rest period for the drug to be absorbed, followed by a

fear test and one-hour recovery. The test was either a public speaking activity in front of an audience and video camera, or reviewing a colour picture of a 10cm spider. In both cases subjects who received cortisone reported less fear and anxiety



before, during and after the test. For the spider test, cortisone treatment (but not the placebo) reduced fear progressively over six sessions during a two-week period.

Cortisone may also improve spider phobia permanently, as subjects reported reduced fear levels during the final session when they received no drug treatment.