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Business watercooler stories

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Climbing up the corporate ladder was cited most frequently as life's most difficult event -- beating out calling it quits with a spouse, adjusting to a relocation or even grieving a death -- by nearly 20 percent of business leaders in a recent survey.

While usually cause for a slap on the back, promotions also force us to deal with more office politics, greater job complexity and increased reliance on others, said Matt Paese of Development Dimensions International, which conducted the study.

Despite the hand-wringing promotions can provoke, almost half of those surveyed said a move into a leadership position positively affected their personal life.

The online survey was conducted in late 2006 among nearly 800 U.S. and foreign business leaders.

PRESENTATION EXASPERATION: If you want to drive your co-workers crazy at a business meeting, interrupt someone, answer your cell phone or fall asleep. If you really want them to curse your name, drag them into a meeting and blather away, absent any planning or sense of direction.

Disorganized, rambling presentations are workers' greatest source of frustration at meetings, a new survey reports.

"If you're going to ask someone for time, make sure you're using their time like you would use your time," said Jeff Resnick of Opinion Research USA, which conducted the survey.

Domineering colleagues, cell phone interruptions and co-workers who fall asleep were runners-up on the list. Pet peeves differed between generations, with workers over 55 complaining about long meetings with no bathroom break, while the 18-24 set wanted food and drinks in exchange for their attention, Resnick said.

Only 4 percent of people complained about meetings starting late, so take heed presenters: Better to be late than long-winded.

The random telephone survey of approximately 1,000 people was conducted in mid-April.

SUMMER STYLE: With summer just around the corner, now's the time to make sure your hemline doesn't rise along with the temperatures.

Too much exposed skin is never appropriate at the office, even in warmer weather, according to business etiquette expert Mary Crane.

"If you would even consider wearing any particular item to the beach or to a picnic or to mow the lawn, it's probably not appropriate to wear to the office," she said.

To make sure your summertime dress is more stylish than scandalous, heed the following workplace wardrobe guidelines, Crane said.

Check the culture of your organization; what's acceptable at a hip Internet startup may prove inappropriate at a conservative law firm.

For women, skirts, dresses or shorts should rise no higher than two inches above the knee. Sorry men, nothing above the ankle is acceptable for you.

Plunging necklines have no place in the office, on men or women. The same goes for flip flops. Ladies, you might be able to get away with a strappy sandal.

Sleeveless tops can be attractive on women, but anything with straps should be saved for the long-awaited weekend.

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