Work, work, work. Brad is actually quite proud of himself for giving much time to his job. When he isn’t on duty he’s either vegging in front of the TV or worrying about his next promotion. He works as much overtime as he can get. His family doesn’t understand why he seldom has time for them, and his social life is nearly non-existent.

Research tells us social connections are important. A recent study of criminal justice professionals showed that those who actively sought social support were those most successful at coping with their work stress.

What’s so important about close relationships?

What do they give us?

- Intimacy
- Support
- Improved health
- Fortification

What is intimacy? Intimate relationships are between people who trust each other. We can be ourselves with intimate others. There are no pretences—no masks, no shields. We feel connected, and that feels good.

We also need others for support. Both receiving and giving support are important for our well-being. We all need someone who not only thinks we’re great, but who is there for us when the chips are down. This doesn’t mean they tell us we’re always right but they hang in there when we’re down.

Recent studies have shown that those who say they have enough support are healthier than those who are isolated. For example, they are less likely to have a heart attack. They heal faster when they are sick.

Close relationships not only help when things are bad but they also "fortify" us, strengthen us. We’re stronger when a crisis comes because of our relationship with them. They are a worthwhile investment.
What does support look like?

Support from others can include:

- Concrete help
- Just being there
- Listening
- Advising

Connection with others is important for our well-being from the time we are infants. Different types of relationships help to withstand daily challenges. Think of a set of nested circles with you in the inner circle and in the next circle surrounding you, those closest to you, family and close friends. They are needed for everyday love and support. At the next level are those you know well but are not close to. They may be co-workers, neighbors, or those who belong to the same groups as you do. They are also important but for less personal support, for example, a smile or advice about a work situation or hints about a lawn problem.

It is important to have a variety of sources of support. This is because no one can be everything to you- it is too much of a burden! Lots of officers find it helpful to have friends who are not officers, reducing the temptation to talk shop all the time. Personal time should be relaxing and renewing not a constant repetition of work. It also helps to have contact with a variety of people who can help renew your faith in humanity– for example, volunteer work with children or others in the community.

We sometimes feel that personal relationships are a luxury we can’t afford. Officers usually have a hectic schedule including work and home commitments, and often extended family and friends take a backseat so it can be difficult to maintain these connections. Also, relationships are reciprocal so friends and family may require some support in return- this can take time and energy! And finally, conflict with friends and family does happen, taking even more resources. However, the gains of a safety net outweigh the costs, making it a necessary and worthwhile investment.

So Officer Brad may enjoy his life more AND stand a greater chance of being promoted if he stepped outside of his work world and “got a life,” such as: join a co-rec softball league, help his folks clean out their garage, and return that call to his cousin about her single roommate who is looking for a date.

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