

Routines are good—if they can be broken

By LORAIN McCLISH

"Routines are, without question, a necessary part of life."

The statement comes from Jim Miner, who conferred with his five-member staff of psychologists in Farmington Public Schools to come up with some answers on habits, rituals and routines.

"The problems come with too much or too little," he continued, "and this is a very individual matter. Some of us depend on routines more than others and this can be good or bad. The big advantage of a routine is that it releases you of having to think of insane things and leaves your mind free to think of more important things."

He recites the morning ritual of getting up, grooming and dressing as an example of one beneficial routine. "We go through the process with such habit it is very unlikely that anybody can tell you whether he puts pants on first and his shirt on after that or vice versa. Who could tell you whether they put their left shoe on before their right?"

But even such a simple thing can be carried to extremes, and the extreme may become debilitating. "When it becomes so rigid you can't change, you know you've gone overboard," he said.

THE EXAMPLE given was that of an elderly couple who rose every morning at 5 a.m., were at the shopping mall doors before they opened for exactly two hours of shopping, home by 11:30 a.m.

for lunch and were scheduled that tightly day after day after day.

Miner doesn't think the example was that unusual in elderly persons. "They have to fill that void with something and a routine is something better than nothing."

"But suppose the grandchildren came over one morning for a visit and intruded on this routine. Could they take that intrusion gracefully? If they can't, it could bring all kinds of anxieties and upsets. They may not be able to eat well or even sleep well for the next several days and nights."

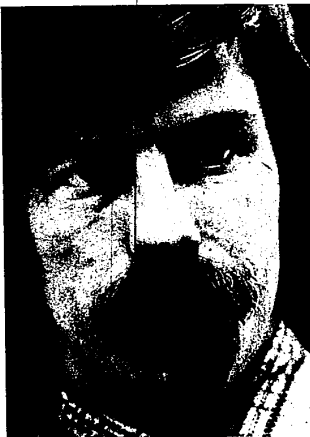
"What we have to do is maintain a pattern that frees us and gives us a margin for intrusions," he said.

He told the story of a healthy and spry 80-year-old gentleman that adhered to a routine of his own and one of his habits is being in bed at 10:30 each night.

"SO FAR as I know, this has never been a problem for him but it sure plays havoc with the relatives. No matter what that family is doing, how good a time they are having or where they are, grandfather stops everything and insists on being driven home at exactly 9:30."

MINER SAID children must have a routine.

"Kids learn by doing spontaneously. They have to have freedom to explore,



JIM MINER

but a child is a whole lot more comfortable when there is routine, ritual and guidelines that he can depend on. And it imposes some internal self discipline.

"The child who can depend on having dinner ready for him at 5 p.m. is a lot happier than the kid who knows it's coming somewhere between 5 and 8," he said, "but even the 5 p.m. kid can get hung up if he can't move from that rigidity."

Most of us are creatures of habit and Miner gives the example of vacations. "The man with the routine job goes to Florida and lies on the beach and does the routine things people do in Florida. He has altered the situation, but he didn't change."

"The man with the stimulating job at home goes to Florida and runs constantly to plays and museums and takes all the tours with the same intensity he goes at his job at home."

But at the same time, we all have the urge, Miner said, or even the need, to do something atypical once in a while for sheer shock value.

"WE SEE 'The Exorcist' or see a football game with a team we know to be totally brutal. We wonder how fast we can take this curve. We walk down a dark street scared all the while. We break a law, break a more, steal apples from the orchard."

"And all the while we're testing and that test is a thrill. We do them unconsciously, involuntarily because there is something in us that demands our system needs this sharpening up."

Miner warns not to fret too much if the morning paper didn't arrive today and broke up your morning routine. Reading the morning paper is one of the most common routines we have.

"You'll know there is a void. You'll know something is wrong and it will probably bug you for a while. Just don't let it disrupt your whole day."

7 a.m. — get up; 7:02 — wash face

She follows schedule 'for convenience'



Lunch at precisely noon is a part of life for a person who follows a strict routine

7 a.m. — get up.
7:02 — wash face.
7:07 — brush teeth.
Monday morning laundry, Tuesday afternoon chores, Saturday errands.

General or specific, routines are the key to organizing a life, even if the routine is none at all.

Routines as such can be established in a variety of ways. Some routines are based on a time element, others follow a general progression of events, while still others must complete Step A in order to do B. Some individuals allow outside activities to influence the order of events.

Whatever the routine, we all have one. And the structuring of it depends on the personalities involved.

MRS. ROY WULFMEIER of Bloomfield Township, whose routine has become old hat, said, "It's for my convenience. I seem to operate better with one."

Her routine, like most, begins in the morning. Unlike most, it starts even before her eyes open. "I hear my husband in the shower and that's when I know it's time to get up."

Once out of bed the routine goes as follows:

1. Don robe and slippers (in that order).
2. Turn on stereo en route to kitchen.
3. Water kitchen plants.
4. Make coffee.
5. Take out two Vitamin C pills.
6. Pour a glass of orange juice.
7. Pour a glass of ice water.
8. Make breakfast.

Somewhere between Step Seven and Eight, Mrs. Wulfmeier "leaves for the morning paper, which is but on the curb. I do that even in the winter, which means I sometimes have to go the back route."

Putting on boots, however, does not disrupt the schedule.

BY 7 A.M. her husband (he's the one who takes the vitamins, drinks the juice and water and eats breakfast) is off to work and she, like many, spends an hour or so with the morning paper and the coffee pot.

Following that she heads for the bathroom "which is pretty well scheduled," gets dressed and is ready for the day.

While Mrs. Wulfmeier's routines may seem rigid or at least extremely pin-pointed, anything goes after getting dressed.

Occasionally, anything goes before getting dressed. "Last summer I played tennis in the morning, that wasn't in my schedule, but it didn't bother me."

DITTO FOR other routines she has partially established for herself.

"As a rule, I'm flexible. If I get a better offer I won't do the laundry on Monday. So what if we run out of underwear, there's a few clean pairs hidden somewhere."

Nor does she grocery shop at an assigned time, again adding "If I get a better offer I might not need to go shopping."

ROUTINES MAY also be established in the way we complete a task. For example, one woman cleans her house room by room, refuses to go onto the next room until the first room is clean.

Mrs. Wulfmeier doesn't do heavy cleaning until the whole house is neat.

"I like the house to look nice before I begin."

Of course there are those who are directly opposed to strict schedules and rigid methods of operation. They are the types who never get up at the same time, never repeat their order of dressing and never know what time it is.

But just because they don't know what they will be doing at 3 p.m. doesn't mean they don't have a routine. Their routine is in not knowing.