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Money and Work: Creating Balance

By Brooke Loening

In my last two columns we looked at several reasons why we might be busy with work. Today I would like to talk about what I think of as the “big one” as it relates to long hours at work: Money.

Yes, most of us need to make money through our work in order to pay for the basic necessities that support our existence. Without food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, and reliable transportation, our quality of life will suffer. There is good reason to want to make enough money to cover these needs. But let’s talk now about when the core needs are totally met.

At this point, you still might feel an internal pressure to work in order to make more money. You may be driven by the belief that you are always better off with more money no matter what your starting point is. Increasing quality of life and “getting ahead” every year is a preprogrammed requirement for many people. With money, we can increase our standard of living, pay for our kid’s educations, buy a better car, live in a nice house, and enjoy a good lifestyle. These are all things that we might set as internal goals for ourselves on a never-ending basis.

Why? We all seem to be born with an internal need for happiness and fulfillment, a void in our hearts which needs to be filled. We could spend our entire lives trying to fill this void with marginal success. And what do we do to fill our inner needs? We do what all previous generations have tried; we look to the material world outside for the answers. These days, that often requires us to have money. Having power and fame are others ways we look outside ourselves for fulfillment which may not directly require money, but frequently they do require money to achieve.

Has this strategy worked? Look where the global greed for money, natural resources, land, and power has gotten us. It can’t be working too well on a grand scale if the state we are in now is a direct reflection of this quest. On an individual basis, it hasn’t worked either. Many people are in a constant state of getting material things because they believe that process is directly linked to their own happiness. I say “getting” because we always seem to need to “get” more to sustain the buzz. It has rarely if ever worked for more than a very short period of time, yet we keep trying!

Studies have shown that once you get beyond the point of being able to put food on the table and have a roof over your head, money is less and less linked to happiness. At some point when the basic needs are met it has been shown to have no link at all. In fact, it may work in reverse. All the material things that we have require work on our part to maintain. The most valuable thing we possess is our time and if that time is being spent

maintaining our material possessions, then that is time we do not have for other things. As they say, you don't get to take any of your "stuff" when you die.

It's time for a new approach by creating a solid awareness of what we are doing now, how it has worked for us, and what some alternatives might be. Let's start with a closer look at our beliefs about money and material possessions. In terms of working for the purpose of making more money, you may want to ask yourself some questions:

Is being busy with work the healthiest way to live my life?
Is more money making me happy and fulfilled?
Do I really need to raise my standard of living?
Do I really need a better car or even just more money in general?
Do those things bring happiness or can happiness come from some of the things that cannot be bought?

You may find more quality in you life from being in nature, quiet time during the day, quality time with family and friends, eating better or exercising.

A great way to achieve fulfillment and happiness is giving to others in a way that feels right and natural to you. This could include volunteering, cooking for someone in need, spending time with younger people who need an adult figure in their lives, habitat for humanity, whatever feels right to you. And, if you can find a way to do some giving without anyone knowing, even better, because if you are looking for approval from your giving, you are still looking outside yourself for that sense of happiness.

What could your life look like if you were not so busy with your work? If you were to pretend to be at the end of your life looking back, what might you say were the most important aspects of your life? Will you say, "I'm glad I spent all that time working?"

An affirmation might say, "I work less and spend more time nurturing myself in other important parts of my life. This way I am more balanced and healthy."

Brooke Loening is a life coach in Sharon who works with individuals, and runs weekly coaching groups on achieving growth in career, health and relationships. For more information and previous columns visit theloeningplan.com. Columns can also be found at textra.com