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Need to be Busy 2: Are you spending too much time at work?

By Brooke Loening

In my last column, I talked about our internal reactions to a slow down at work, and how we might resist a change in how “busy” we are with work. This week I would like to address a few other reasons why we might be very busy with work.

Avoidance

We all know people who use work to avoid something else that they would rather not face. For some, it might be a relationship at home, which has problems that seem too overwhelming to deal with. Others might use work as a way to avoid the demands of their children. Staying at work seems legitimate and defensible versus doing something else to avoid going home, like going out with friends for dinner, or going to the movies. Saying to your spouse or partner “I am so busy at work these days” might actually feel real even if it’s not totally true, and is a way to push off issues indefinitely. This strategy never really works long term as we all know because the problem continues on and on, and the weight of carrying that burden internally takes its toll.

Addressing the core of the problem, like having a truthful conversation with a spouse, may be highly intimidating but will open doors to the possibility of much more healthy changes. One person I know avoided her children for years, using her work as the excuse. They were simply too much for her. After some hard internal reflection, during one week she created a plan to turn that around and stuck to it. It was called “face time.” Now, these children are the most important people in her life and she can barely believe that there was a day when she hardly knew them.

Some people stay at work to avoid being alone in their house. Work is better than the feelings of loneliness and all the thoughts and feelings that go with it. A better solution might to be focus on building a social life outside of work. Instead of working late, joining other people in the things that interest you through groups and clubs would be a good way to meet like-minded people, and build a social network.

Obsessed With Work

Some of my friends and clients work long hours, not for the money or to avoid anything, but rather because they are obsessed by their work. They love it as much as anything else and choose to do it because that is where they are the most comfortable, and they would rather be working than almost anything else. I see this frequently with business owners. Initially, when one starts a business, you must wear many hats and work around the clock to get things off the ground. It is almost essential to live and breathe every detail of the business to create a success. The problem I see here is that these people don’t know when to stop. Once the business is running smoothly, they feel the need to make it bigger and better, and they continue working the same long hours. These people might be

working at night and meeting clients on the weekends. They are the classic “workaholics.”

Identity Crisis

For some, there is a fine line between their identity as individuals and the work they do. Their work is such a huge part of who they are and takes up most of their time and energy, that they actually “become” their work. For these people their work is their life and their life is their work. They do not have other ways to define their uniqueness other than work and career; therefore time away from work can end up feeling uncomfortable. These people are either working or talking about their work all the time.

If you are obsessed or overly identified with your work, you may need to ask yourself if your life is lacking balance. Nourishment comes from many sources and drawing from all those sources is a healthy approach. What does a balanced, healthy life include? Here are a few ideas:

- Exercise
- Eating slowly and healthfully
- Time in nature
- Quality time with family
- A circle good friends
- Cultural enrichment
- Time for contemplation or meditation
- Giving back to others
- Travel
- Hobbies
- Relaxing

How are you doing in relation to this list? If you feel like you are spending more time working than you really need to and is healthy for you, take a look and ask yourself why you are doing it. Would reevaluating and restructuring your work be a healthy move for you and those around you? Ask yourself what the downside might really be if you were to cut back to a more reasonable work schedule. Are your greatest fears likely to come true? What would happen if you were to face what you have been avoiding at home? Instead of just operating based on your subconscious beliefs, bring some awareness to the situation and experiment with making some changes. Most important of all, focus your attention on some of the upsides of integrating more balance into you life.

This is an affirmation that might help. “I work more reasonable hours, and focus more attention on getting nourishment from other important things in life.”

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 tcextra.com