

# Work addiction can be negative

*Corporate environment, unfortunately, encourages unhealthy work patterns that destroy an individual's life.*



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Today's executives are faced with complex challenges surrounding what may really be called Life Balance choices. This dynamic has become one of great concerns in assessing both the physical and mental health of today's executives at the workplace.

Many of these executives are of the highest caliber, talented people in their companies. Work addiction syndrome is not a result of will power, lack of talent, education, morals or family values. In many instances, the executives affected by this dysfunction are not even aware of the nature of the problem.

What they are aware of is that life is not fun anymore, and they are being affected both at work and at home. In some instances, the many accomplishments resulting from their addictive work patterns unfortunately do not satisfy the executives.

The work addict is driven to perform even harder and accomplish even more due to the inability to relax, feel and smell the scent of today's success. These intense work schedules and associated behaviours can be symptomatic of underlying issues, insecurities and a distorted self-image. In many instances, the workaholic behaviours are self imposed, but not based on an accurate perception of oneself.

**WORK ADDICTION AND HARD WORK:** It is important to differentiate between someone who has a 'Type A' personality and is an extremely hard worker, and someone who demonstrates the characteristics of the Work Addiction Syndrome. Type A workers appear like they are workaholics, yet they always demonstrate the ability to set healthy boundaries when needed. When the work addicts gain the insight into their unhealthy patterns, they demonstrate a loss of control or an inability to self-regulate their schedule and set healthy limits.

In spite of serious negative consequences, the individual suffering from Work Addiction Syndrome will continue to act out the negative pattern affecting their life. Consistent with other addictions, denial can play a major factor in the work addict's ability to reach out for help. The denial factor can prevent the impaired executive from seeing or experiencing the reality of their life. They have an altered perception when it applies to this area of their life. In many instances, the workaholic possesses an over-developed, sense of 'self' as it applies to their career. The executive's career takes on the importance of defining who they are, not what they do.

Unfortunately, in today's corporate environment, several times the work addict is encouraged, supported and compensated for these unhealthy patterns. When we take time to look beneath the surface of work addiction, the corporate price tag for this dysfunction can be very costly. In many cases, the company or organization is unaware of the serious impairment the executive may be experiencing. What looks like someone who is dedicated and acting on behalf of the company, may indeed be someone who is out of control and cannot stop working until they experience serious consequences. At the point of management recognizing this workaholic-type behaviour, it will serve everyone to help this person receive appropriate help. He or she will be a much more productive, valuable employee in the future.

In today's world of downsizing, mergers, take-overs, etc., it is not unusual to find businesses and/or

organizations unknowingly encouraging and supporting work addiction. Many large corporations are either informed or in denial of the serious problems incurred as a direct result of this syndrome gone untreated. These problems can range from low morale, substance abuse, excess stress, workplace harassment, various personal and family problems and absenteeism. This dynamic can ultimately create a state of tension and chaos at the workplace. Assessing the Life Balance component for any executive can provide extremely valuable insight into their personal and professional lives.

**EVALUATING WORK ADDICTION SYNDROME:** There are certain ways in which one can evaluate his working pattern. The following are some tips:

- ⌚ How much time do you spend working, and how much time do you spend with family, friends, etc? Is your work schedule causing problems in your family or social life?
- ⌚ Do you feel out of control or powerless at times when it comes to setting limits, going home or quitting work for the day?
- ⌚ Are you having a difficult time enjoying the fruits of your labours, in spite of the financial success or being respected and admired in your company?
- ⌚ Do you break promises to yourself, family or friends regarding work time, travel schedules, and other related employment activities?
- ⌚ Do you have difficulty 'letting go' and delegating work?
- ⌚ Have your work patterns affected intimate friendships, and/or important social activities you once enjoyed such as vacations, fishing, sports and reading?
- ⌚ When on vacation, is it difficult to relax and disengage from work, therefore interrupting or contaminating your vacation time with family or friends?
- ⌚ Has your physical health deteriorated due to an excessive work schedule?
- ⌚ Have you unsuccessfully attempted to cut down or stop from overworking, over-committing, staying at the office, etc. Promising to spend more time at home, going to the gym or golf course, and not following through?

If you answered 'yes' to three or more of these questions, you may be suffering from the Work Addiction Syndrome. If so, it is extremely important not to attempt to treat this on your own without help. The objectivity, support and recommendations available from working with an experienced professional will be invaluable. The person affected by any type of addiction is typically too close to the problem to have their own answers.

**MAKING LIFE BETTER:** The direction of our lives is determined by the choices we make every day. The accumulate and add up to make our ultimate fortune. Here are some top choices to make as we begin a new moment in life; choices that will create for you a life of abundance and prosperity in all areas of your existence.

- ⌚ Grow personally. This sounds simple, but many people only wish to grow personally. They never choose to grow by taking action, such as actually exercising, saving more money, etc. Make a decision today to be a person who is on the never-ending journey of personal growth. Treat others right. We come across all sorts of people, many of whom will treat us poorly. We can choose to treat them right, no matter how they treat us. When they lie, we will tell the truth. When they cheat, we will play by the rules. We may get the short end of the stick sometimes, but in the long run, we will win. And, most importantly, we will be able to sleep at night.
- ⌚ Break a bad habit. Take any bad habit.; tackle it head-on. If you don't know what it is, ask a friend. Then spend every effort you can to break that habit. Forget about the others, as you will get to them later. Stop smoking, get out of debt, and lose your excess weight. Exercise the power to choose. But, one at a time.
- ⌚ Work smarter. Many people feel like they are out of balance. One of the first things to do is to find out how much time they are wasting at work, which makes them work longer, which throws the rest of their life into chaos. Getting your work done by diligently working in the time you have will free your life up extraordinarily.

- ⌚ See your work as a way to help others, and not a way to make money. If you put your heart into helping others, the money will most definitely come. Spend time helping others grow, and your finances will grow with it.
- ⌚ Be balanced spiritually, emotionally and physically. Our lives are best when we have these three major areas in balance. Spend some time cultivating your spirituality, becoming emotionally healthy, and physically fit.
- ⌚ Sow more than you reap. There are many takers in this world, but our lives will be better as we become givers. The world will become better as we become givers. Give away your time, give away your money, give away your love.\* Get home for dinner more often. The family is the most important group of people you will ever belong to. Make a decision today to grow in your relationship with your parents, spouse and children. This one choice you will never regret.

**RELAXATION TIPS:** Relaxation is a powerful tool. Learn to relax yourself, do it regularly and you will find it easier to keep anxiety at the right level to cope more effectively with tough situations and difficult people. You will feel generally healthier - and even improve your sporting activities. Here are simple ingredients for effective relaxation:

- ⌚ Don't try to relax! Get fairly comfortable, and simply pay attention to any tension, aches and pains, or anxious thoughts you may have. Don't do anything - just observe tension - and it will probably start to fade.
- ⌚ Focus on your breathing. Aim for long, slow, regular breaths. Let your stomach swell out like a balloon as you breathe in, then let it deflate as you breathe smoothly out. On the 'out' breath, try to let go of all the air, imagine tension flowing out of your body, and allow your chest to sag downwards as you exhale (which automatically relaxes the muscles of the shoulders and neck). Your breathing will settle more easily into a regular rhythm if you imagine ocean waves, or the swing of a long pendulum. Try breathing in to a slow count of four, hold for two, and breathe out to a slow count of six.
- ⌚ Relax muscle groups one at a time: Let muscles progressively become soothing and slightly heavier with each breath, perhaps counting slowly from 1 to 5 as you do so. Mentally repeat a phrase like, 'My arm is heavy and relaxed', or 'My legs are feeling warm, heavy and comfortable'.
- ⌚ Use your imagination to relax mind and body. With eyes closed, picture tension slowly flowing from your legs, arms, head and stomach towards your chest, ready to be blown away along with each 'out' breath. Use a memory you associate with relaxation and fun. Use all your senses to make the image more real - and focus on details.

Anxious or negative thoughts can really interfere with relaxation. One way to overcome this problem is to stop trying to relax, don't try to throw out stressful thoughts, but allow them to come into your mind. Visualize them as clouds passing overhead which just float away; write worries on an imaginary blackboard and let rain slowly wash it clean. Try tensing up all your muscles and let them relax in their own time. By accepting the tension and worry, you allow relaxation to occur naturally. But if you get frustrated, go and do something useful and come back to relaxing later. Learning to relax and use your imagination makes you very powerful; you will deal more effectively with stress and be more likely to achieving your goals. It takes practice, but it is well worth the effort. It really is.

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