

How to Become a "Positive Workaholic"

If you're like many small business owners, you log **at least 50 -- possibly closer to 60 or 70 -- hours a week** in the harness. You may put in a few late nights each week... spend some hours on Saturday (perhaps even Sunday) wrapping up details...tend to start vacations a day late and return a day early...slip away from the family in the evening to handle a few "just gotta get to" papers, bids, plans, etc. In the constant battle to keep your bottom line in the black, you do the work of two or three employees.

In short, **you may be a workaholic**. Many workaholics are guilt-ridden, driven souls who -- either due to fear of failure or genuine personal choice -- exist only to work. They neglect their own needs, the needs of their loved ones...even their own health. Ironically, even the business eventually suffers. As they become increasingly task oriented rather than results oriented, the time they put in becomes self-justifying and their productivity plunges. Eventually, they can become so completely addicted to work that they burn themselves out...and burn out their personal relationships as well. They can end up broke, alone and in poor health, plagued with stress-related illnesses.

But it doesn't have to be that way. **You can become a *positive workaholic!*** Positive workaholics live fast-paced, full lives. They work hard, but they also play hard. Most of all, they get a lot done and are generally successful in their business and personal lives.

How to become a positive workaholic: You are a resource. When it comes to efficient, quality productivity, you are a machine that creates value. You are also a human being. How can you operate at maximum effectiveness and efficiency when it comes to building and running your business...and also maintain a satisfying life for yourself and others away from work? Here are a few suggestions:

- **Strive for balance** in your life. Successful workaholics see themselves not just as business owners, but also as spouses, parents, members of the community, sports fans, charitable volunteers, boaters, etc. Though they may not mix business and pleasure, they make sure they include a healthy mixture of both in their lives on a daily basis.

Suggestion: Devote at least one focused hour each day to something (A) you value and enjoy and (B) that has absolutely no connection to business.

- **Be goal-oriented.** If you enjoy work for work's sake, just dig a ditch each morning and fill it in each afternoon. Positive workaholics work to achieve specific objectives. They map out their life goals and their business goals. The work they do every day is undertaken to help bring them that much closer to their objectives.

Suggestion: Start by setting aside some time today to sketch out your most important business goals and personal goals...things you'd like to achieve or do by the end of this year. Put a star beside the single most important one on each list. Then develop the daily and weekly activities that will virtually *guarantee* your success in achieving these goals. This will give you tremendous focus each day.

- **Boost your efficiency.** Time can be your enemy or your friend. But people who achieve success in business and satisfaction in their personal lives do so partially because they have learned to accomplish more in less time.

Suggestion: Structure your time as if it were gold. Don't walk into work, look around and then decide what needs to be done. Instead, begin each day

with a to-do list of what you need to accomplish during that day. That way you can hit the ground running each morning and move steadily and efficiently from task to task.

- **Enjoy the trip**, not just the goal. Positive workaholics enjoy what they do...and the daily process of doing it. They love to get up and go to work in the morning...and they love to go home in the evening. They resist feeling guilty about either putting in too much time or taking too much time off. If they've planned their work and leisure time properly, they can focus on each separately and forget the other.

Suggestion: Build in rewards for yourself and your family...something to look forward to outside of work. Maybe it's the Thursday all-you-can-eat buffet for lunch at your favorite restaurant or going to a movie in midweek. This expands to get-away weekends and at least one extended vacation each year.

- **Build in family time** or social time every day...even if you have to schedule it by the clock. This helps safeguard the things you really care about.

Suggestion: Actively plan family time. The best kind of activities tend to be daily routines. Consider things like planned dinners together; helping children with homework; reading bedtime stories; cooking dinner together; etc. This is one of the great advantages of being a business owner. You can leave work at three o'clock to catch your daughter's softball game, spring for pizza with the team afterwards, then put in a few extra hours in the evening.

- Learn to **live in "daytight compartments."** Owning a business is a high-stress way of life. It can be difficult to simply walk away from work and turn off the problems and concerns of the day. But that doesn't mean it's impossible. The idea is to plan with broad vision, but to live each day as if there were no yesterday and no tomorrow. Focus only on the one right smack in front of you.
- **Suggestions:** Some business owners take a shower every evening after they get home, symbolically washing away the cares of the day. Others may put in long, grueling, highly-structured hours during the week; then on Friday afternoon, they take off their watches, devote themselves one hundred percent to family and social activities and refuse to even think about work until Monday morning. Most of all, no briefcase ever gets in the front door.
- **Take time for daily renewal.** This could also be referred to as recharging your spiritual batteries. It is very easy to lose sight of the forest for the trees as you slog through a daily schedule. Before long, you could become lost... doubting yourself and questioning the basic premises about your life and your values.
Suggestion: Block out even just half an hour each day for prayer or meditation, to read a few pages from an inspirational book or to listen to a cassette on self-improvement.
- **Watch your health.** Keep yourself physically tuned up and in peak form, and avoid using alcohol or tobacco as stress relievers. This will make you more efficient, able to focus more on work, get by with less sleep, require fewer sick days and be overall more productive. There is a direct connection between physical fitness and work

productivity. (A recent study showed absenteeism among workers who had a high level of cardiovascular fitness was 25% to 40% lower than for less physically fit workers.)

Suggestion: Get regular exercise... even if it only means taking the dog for a half-hour walk each day. Also, learn to eat intelligently. Some foods give you energy, help strengthen your body; others drag you down. Talk to your doctor.

The bottom line: Workaholism needn't be a dirty word. On the contrary, it can be a very positive thing. By becoming a positive workaholic, you can build a prosperous business life and enjoy a rewarding and successful business.

Dr. James A. McCain is a Management Consultant in Rexford, New York and may be reached at Business Works, 518-383-3337, or through his web site at www.bizdrsolution.com.