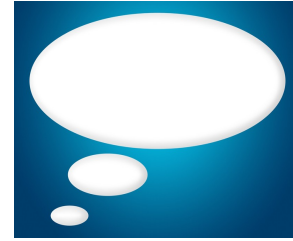


**“If I Get My Work Done, Then I Can Relax.”  
What thoughts are driving your work habits?  
Thriving at Work- May 2009**



Do you ever think this? Thoughts like this are beneath the awareness of many professionals who are trying to keep up with an increasing workload using fewer resources. It can be hard to walk away for the day knowing there will be a pile of work waiting the next day. Wouldn't it be satisfying to catch up for once, so you could relax and have some down time, at least for a day or two?

What's Going On?

When you were a kid, were you ever told, *"Do your chores, and then we'll go swimming (or whatever)."* Many of us were taught to do our work first, and then we can play. It's a good strategy for parents to motivate and teach kids. But, parents are usually pretty good about balancing chores and play time for kids, and kids are pretty good about letting their parents know when there hasn't been enough play time.

Our education system also reinforces this approach. Students finish up a school year, turn in all their books and homework and take a break before going to the next level.

However, once you grow up and are working full-time, the pattern is different. You probably don't have a boss who says, *"Ok, get that report done, and then we'll go get some ice cream."* (Although if you do have a boss that does this, I'd love to hear about it.)

As my friend Barbara said, it's more like, *"Ok, get that project done, and then I'll give you three more."* What?! There's always more to do than time to do it in, so you end up working longer and harder to keep up, and the play time and other personal rewards get put off into the future. Without a person or system incorporating down time into your routine, you may find yourself working for the reward of the paycheck and bonuses at the expense of your health and well-being.

Then, by the time vacation time rolls around, it takes three days just to slow down and forget your to do list. By the time you're feeling more rested, it's time to get back to work and the hectic pace.

This way of working isn't working for a lot of people. They're stressed, sick, disgruntled, depressed, less productive, and/or burned out. Changing jobs or careers becomes the focus because it's the one time they stop taking on new projects and hand off the rest of their responsibilities and finally catch up, which means they can relax--- until they start the new job.

What Can You Do?

If you just try to change your behavior without understanding what's really going on, you're likely to slip back into old patterns or create other problems. So, the most important and often trickiest step is to become aware of the unexamined thoughts and beliefs that are driving your behavior. Once you identify them, you can determine if they are serving you well.

1. What are the underlying thoughts and assumptions driving you to work the way you do? See if any of these fit:

- "If I get my work done, then I'll get promoted (make more money), and then I can do more of what I want."
- "If I don't catch up, it means I'm incompetent, a failure, lazy, etc."
- "If I don't keep up, I'll get fired."

Write them down so you can look at them in light of day instead of letting them run you.

Then, as author and speaker Byron Katie says, ask yourself, "Can you absolutely (100%) know for sure that these thoughts are true?" No, not absolutely.

2. Clarify what you *do* want and ask it as a question, such as, "*How can I accomplish what's really important and feel more relaxed (have more fun) in the process?*" Hmmm. This gives your mind a positive goal to focus on instead.

3. Write down at least 5-6 small steps you could take today that could move you closer to that goal. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Play music while I'm working.
- Mark times on my calendar to take breaks-- and then take them!
- At the end of the day, acknowledge myself for 2-3 things I accomplished. (Give myself a gold star for each one!)
- Instead of doing my work first all the time, do something fun first thing in the morning so I'm in a good mood the rest of the day. (Crazy!!)

What would delight the kid in you? There's no one right answer. You have to take on the role of taking care of yourself because no one else is going to do it for you. It's not always easy, or you'd already be doing it. But, try taking a small step every day and notice the changes in your attitude, energy level, and performance.

When you find ways to balance work and play time and even incorporate more fun during the day, you're actually more productive in the long run. Then, you'll discover the opposite could also be true. "*If I can relax, then I can get my work done!*"

Live well,

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