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Too Busy is Not Healthy

By Jeff Davidson

Put down that sandwich and read this closely! When you read while you eat, or vice versa, neither activity is fully experienced, and the clock seems to tick faster. You might be reading while eating alone for company, not because of time pressure; nevertheless, your perception is that the hour is passing more quickly.

Writer Marta Vogel observes: "Early man looked at his food to make sure it was dead and that it didn't have any bugs in it." Twenty-first century man, however, no longer looks at the food itself; he looks at the package. "Corporate America discovered that man could become addicted to package reading in almost any situation," says Vogel.

Recognizing our craving for information, advertisers provide pleasing product packaging. The average cereal box contains about 2,000 words, equal to eight pages of a book. Vogel says, "Generic products [of the same quality as mid-level brands] were offered with the knowledge that no one might buy wordless cardboard and risk an attack of package deprivation."

Package deprivation? It probably comes as no surprise to you that far more than half our population wears clothes or accessories designed with slogans and messages on them. Madison Avenue prevails!

Attraction to labeling and package copy further robs you of breathing space. So do clothes, yours or others', with messages on them. Minute bits of extraneous data do have a cumulative impact. You deserve a real break today. Eat some nutritious food, with people in message-free clothing, and with no reading material in sight.

Other symptoms abound -- not only while eating. Do you attempt to think, converse, study, or even make love with distractions? Do you go through the motions of attempting to concentrate with office noise? Do you awake by alarm clock?

Do three square meals and sufficient sleep mean anything to you? Are long-standing hobbies no longer of interest to you? Do old friends only merit an occasional phone call? Do you attempt to converse while watching television? Do you "need" to wind down before bed in front of the TV? Can you even sit in front of it without turning it on?

Here are some telltale signs of being too busy:

- * If you're too busy to enjoy your life, you're too busy.
- * If you're too busy to stay calm, you're too busy.
- * If you're too busy to stay in shape, you're too busy.
- * If you're too busy to see your friends, you're too busy.
- * If you think that someday you'll catch up in all these areas, you're living under a delusion.

Low Quality Leisure

Leisure, as a concept, is on the rocks. Surely, it no longer means total hours minus work hours. True leisure -- enjoying a rewarding activity free from work and preoccupation with work -- is a necessary component of a balanced life.

When the shift between pressure-filled activity and true leisure is abrupt, the quality of your leisure is likely to suffer. Is your leisure squeezed between frenzied activities? Strains of the workweek tend to make you place great emphasis on your weekends and other days off. You hope to relax, but the pressure is enormous, and often you can't rest even when you've got the hours to do so.

Constant time-pressure invariably leads to anxiety and guilt about where and to what you give your attention. Many fathers' weekend encounters with their children are scheduled, if they exist at all. "Dad never plays with us any more."

The pressured individual feels guilty both doing too much and doing too little. "Could I have done more?" "Should I have done otherwise?" Even when blessed with leisure, your mind may not be free to enjoy it.

Parents are concerned about how much time they spend with their kids. Spouses feel guilty about periods spent away from each other. Pressed and frazzled by the onslaught of responsibilities, more couples are finding it exhausting to have to "be" with one another – to converse, empathize and respond. The inability to be with one another is a yet-to-be-recognized fallout of a time-pressured existence.

Annually, the number of families headed by a single adult, usually female, is growing, placing inordinate strains on working individuals with children. Families with two income earners have more income and spend more, but invariably experience greater time-pressure. In any case, in this 24x7 world a cultural inability to relax dogs us and negates many benefits leisure traditionally has provided.

This, in turn, impacts the quality of your work day. Even as more labor-saving and enhanced communication technologies are introduced, and your output and efficiency rises, your expectations directly increase. You become less satisfied with yourself for not doing more.

Human Doings

The feeling of no breathing space can quickly pervade all aspects of your life, diminish your happiness and eliminate any joie de vivre. The cycle can get vicious. Lacking a balance between work and play, responsibility and respite, "getting things done" becomes the end-all. You function like a human doing instead of a human being. You begin to link successfully executing the items on your growing "to do" list with feelings of worthiness. As the list keeps growing longer, the lingering sense of more to do infiltrates your sense of harmony and self-acceptance.

You are whole and complete right now. Everything on your "to-do" list, even at the workplace, is undertaken at your option. You are not your tasks, they don't define you and they don't constrain you.

On a deeply felt personal level, recognize that from now on you will be subjected to an ever-increasing number of items competing for your attention. You cannot handle everything, nor is making the attempt desirable.

Recognize, with the clarity of death, that life is finite; you can no longer wistfully in-take the daily deluge and expect to achieve balance. You cannot submissively yield to the din and settle for living your life in what's left over after each day's onslaught. Make sensible choices about what is best ignored and what merits your attention.

Jeff Davidson is "The Work-Life Balance Expert®" addressing corporate and association audiences. He wrote "Breathing Space," "Simpler Living," the "60 Second Innovator," and the "60 Second Self-Starter." Visit www.Work-LifeBalance.net or call 800.735.1994 for more information on Jeff's keynote speeches and seminars.

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