

effective environments

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“I’m Too Busy”

Are you someone who is always “busy”? Is this your common response to “How are you?” Do you usually fret about having too much to do? These are frequent themes in day-to-day life. If we could only do more faster, THEN maybe we wouldn’t be so busy. We would cease to be “behind” . . . we could catch up.

In this issue, we look at being busy and having too much to do, and its impact on our quality of life. We also suggest ways to begin to alter both.

Being Busy

There seem to be degrees of “busy.” Sometimes we are merely “busy.” This seems to be a generally accepted condition.

However, when we are “too busy,” or “really busy,” life begins to lose its glamor. We have: not enough time, too much to do, no personal life, a feeling of being burned out, etc. It’s not “good” to be “too busy.” We often have physical reactions to being too busy. We might feel breathless, tense, tired or worn down. Being too busy drains energy. Life looks a little bleak, and there is

no end in sight. At some point we become resigned that life could be any different.

The perniciousness of this depiction of being busy and having too much to do is that we think it is REAL! We reinforce one another in this perspective and even encourage it. At work, don’t we all agree that we, the people in this organization, are too busy? Isn’t it true that everyone has too much to do? How will we ever get it all done?! We end up with an environment of “we’re really busy and we all have too much to do.” Indeed, in the modern work culture of many organizations, being busy is a badge of honor. Brief conversations at the office may revolve around how late we worked last night, how long it’s been since we had a day off, how exhausted we’re becoming. In this environment, there is little room to invent a life of grace and ease. Busy is good.

This results in loss of quality of life, life feeling out of balance, not enough time for the important things like family and friends or nurturing ourselves. Life can be a little burdensome or, at least,

lead to a lack of creativity and excellence in the organization, as people work beyond the point of diminishing returns and begin to make errors from haste or overwhelm.

What causes it?

Being busy, and its companion state of overwhelm, are often caused by biting off more than we can chew or by having no ability to distinguish between “now” and “later.” Without a place to stand, everything is equally important, equally urgent. From that vantage point, everything must be done NOW. Stress ensues, and taking time for oneself seems inappropriate, selfish, even disastrous.

Another Possibility

Consider this: **“Being busy” doesn’t exist in nature.** It isn’t a tangible or visible phenomenon. Other animals — even those who seem perpetually occupied — don’t experience it. “Busy” doesn’t exist unless and until you speak it. Being busy is simply an interpretation we invented that describes how life occurs. Included in this interpre-

tation are some added pejorative judgments about what it means — such as, “it shouldn’t be this way,” or “being busy is bad.”

When we strip away the thoughts, emotions, interpretations and physical sensations associated with being too busy and having too much to do, all that is left is a set of actions to take. There is this action, then there is the next action, and the next. Nothing else! There is no “busy” or “too much” inherent in any action we can or do take. There is only the action.

The number of actions (or projects, goals, objectives) you *could* take will always be greater than you have the time or resources to complete, unless you and your boss are both utterly lacking in imagination. In fact, assuming you both have some imagination — and some vision of new possibilities — there will ALWAYS be more to do than there is time to do it. The real question is: How will you identify the actions that you will take?

Intervening

Intervening in being busy and having too much to do begins with *creating a stand* FOR something new. Taking a stand is a particular kind of declaration. It is a declaration that a specific result *shall be achieved*. The declaration is made from your commitment to that result. Often such a stand is made without knowing, in the moment of taking the stand, how it will be achieved. The nature of the stand is yours to invent. For example, you could stand for a

breakthrough results, fun and a spirit of genuine partnership, or for a life that nurtures you. Your stand need not be supported by the evidence at the time you take it. It is more effective if is NOT dependent on existing circumstances. (A “stand” based on circumstances is a prediction; it falters when the circumstances change.)

Principles and Practices

There are principles and practices that can support you in putting your stand into action. The following four principles for managing yourself provide a foundation for intervening in being too busy:

- Identify what is important to you and in what period of time (this week, this month, this year, etc.).
- Make what is important manageable and do-able. (Create a plan!)
- Make choices that are consistent with achieving what is important.
- Invent and use practices that support your effectiveness.

These principles apply any time for any situation. They provide a place to “think from” when choosing what you will do and what you won’t do.

Several practices are useful in applying these principles:

- Creating and working from aligned-upon priorities
- Sharing these priorities with

important

- Measuring (and celebrating) accomplishment every day

Notice what takes you off track and address it. What do you spend time on, OTHER than what you said you would do? What can you do about it?

Say “no” sometimes. If you say “yes,” figure out what will get bumped and make an alternative plan for it.

A related practice is to make promises that are realistic rather than “best case.” If everything goes as well as you hope, you can always deliver early and impress people!

Final Thoughts

Above all, remember that busyness is a state of mind and a way of thinking and speaking. Ask yourself if you have a commitment to living life differently. If so, begin to take actions to change your direction. Make plans that give you some breathing room. Make choices that are strategic. And, above all, don’t start work on ANYTHING until you are clear (1) it’s do-able and (2) it’s the right stuff to be working on.

Thank You

Our thanks to all of you who took the time to respond to our recent survey. We appreciate the many excellent suggestions you made for future newsletter topics and will do our best to address them in forthcoming issues.

Your feedback, questions and ideas are ALWAYS welcome and that we will gladly add or remove people from our mailing list at any time. We are dedicated to having our newsletter be a source of empowerment for those who receive it -- rather than clutter!

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