



# Knowing when to stop

With our virtual world turning working hours and office attendance into an altogether more fluid affair, David Parmenter offers guidance on how not to be a workaholic

Some of the greatest discoveries ever made have been the byproduct of workaholics, but there are also many people out there who just can't stop working, regardless of the quality of the output.

While at the extremes this can be a very serious condition, there are a number of borderline workaholics who could benefit from taking a step back and re-assessing their priorities.

Borderline workaholics in management positions can be dangerous, as they will suck their staff into the vortex of their meaningless pursuits. They can be the worst managers but the best talkers.

But on your death bed, will all the meaningless deadlines that drove you, those reports you worked on at 3am that nobody read, mean that at your funeral there will be an outpouring of respect?

Many of us are task-driven. We are motivated to succeed no matter how stupid or meaningless the target is. We feel we will get a great deal of satisfaction from it and yet, on completion, were we not disappointed

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by the fleeting moment of pleasure? Here are some mitigating steps to take if you feel that you're heading down the slippery slope.

- \* Look at deadlines carefully before committing to them. Are they going to make a difference? Are they connected with the organisation's critical success factors? If not, they might not be that important.
- \* Ensure your team has regular meetings somewhere outside the office. You get a different perspective when you get together in cafes or other public spaces. Get away from your prison and mingle with real life.
- \* Avoid working through lunch. Eating 'al desko' signals that you are not on top of things, or worse, lack perspective. You need a break in times when you feel that is the last thing you can afford to do – again, to get a clearer perspective on the issue at hand. Consider scheduling lunches with people you either need to work with better or should network with. We may all think we

are heroes working nonstop for 14 hours, but in reality we are going nowhere quickly. Always take breaks.

- \* Take special care of your high-performing staff. These driven employees will at some point burn out, and then you get the surprise resignation. When running General Electric, Jack Welch extracted every bit of value out of staff and managers. But at the same time, he would enable staff who had already collected a pile of 'I owe you' chits to take time out to recover their work-life balance before pressing on.
- \* Look for a safe haven. Schedule more time in your diary for finding and nurturing relationships, hobbies and sports that will make your life more meaningful. This is particularly important when you are faced with redundancy. It happened to Sir Winston Churchill on three occasions. Each time he cocooned himself at his secluded residence at Chartwell in Kent.

The next time a deadline comes up, make sure it is going to mean something. Otherwise it is far better to go home earlier and visit that elderly neighbour or help charge someone's car battery. It is these gifts of time that will be remembered, that will make your life richer and more meaningful. **AB**

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