
A Guide To Constantly Working

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Introduction

Are you a workaholic? Do you hear the term and think, yeah, that's me, but what's the big deal? I enjoy my work and enjoy getting paid for doing what I love, so why should I be made to feel bad about it?

I tend to think you're not alone. It seems as though society and its intellectual researchers are too quick to put negative labels on behaviors and then instantly set out to change them before gaining a true understanding of what they are setting out to change. Now, don't get me wrong, there are some folks out there who display extremely destructive behavior when it comes to balancing work with the many other things in their lives, but I would argue they are extreme cases. For most of us, the label of "workaholic" has either been improperly bestowed, or has been improperly understood by the person applying the label. I argue many of us so-called workaholics are just fine.

I believe we can all find a balance between work and life and wear our label of "workaholic" with pride, knowing we have the ability to concentrate on our work, get the job done, yet still make time for other important things. I argue, much like all things in life, if we are REASONABLE, we can find a balance.



Health

I recently read an article that spoke of how working too much can be hazardous to your health. While I can definitely see this as being the case for some, again, I feel this only occurs in the most extreme of scenarios. There is definitely a way to make time through the day for exercise and eating right, no matter how much you work. We are talking a matter of mere minutes a day when it comes to diet and a matter of mere hours a day when it comes to exercise.

The detractors of constantly working say we workaholics are much more likely to grab unhealthy meals. While this may be true, I argue an unhealthy meal has far more to do with personal choice than working too much. Next time you are at the grocery store, buy some healthy snacks and what you need to make a healthy lunch. Then, each morning before work, take a few minutes to put together some healthy snacks and a healthy meal to take with you. It is honestly not much work at all and can be accomplished in just ten minutes per morning. Then, throughout the day instead of grabbing fast food or a candy bar out of a vending machine, eat the food you brought with you.

Now, as for a lack of exercise, this is also much more of a personal choice than a product of working too much. I argue you can set aside time for exercise each and every day either before or after work. You and I both know there is at least one hour a day where you could exchange some other activity or combine something you already do each day with exercise. I spend an hour each morning before work, checking my email and reading trade articles, and I do it on my phone while I am walking. I am still accomplishing a much-needed task, just walking while I do it. Again, there is a perfectly reasonable balance you can find between your work and your health.

Of course, I am not saying you have to eat healthy and exercise every day in order to be a proper workaholic. You can do that just fine while never leaving your desk and eating all the junk and fast food you want. What I am saying, however, is those who insist working too much is the cause of poor eating habits and a lack of exercise are greatly mistaken. These are factors of personal choice and most definitely not caused by working too much.

Working Longer Hours

The article I read also said one of the symptoms of a workaholic is working longer hours than the rest of the office. This one made me laugh. See, when I had a job where I worked everyday from 5AM to 3PM, I was constantly barraged with jokes about leaving early and how nice it must have been to work a half-day when I left each day at 3PM, even after having been in the office for ten hours. What I know to be true is most of these jokes were coming from folks who arrived at work somewhere between 8:30 and 9:30 but were long gone by 5:30 on the days I stayed later. So, I would argue working longer than everyone else in the office isn't difficult, a strain, or a symptom of working too much, and is based far more on perception than actual hours worked or tasks completed. Work 9 or 10 hours and you've got 99% of them beat. By the very definition of this symptom of workaholism, working 10 hours at the office means you're nuts! Realistically, though, it's at worst, two more hours a day than everyone else. That still leaves you with 14 hours left in the day, my workaholic friends!

But ultimately, my argument about hours worked at the office is as follows: A very successful businessman once told me that you don't look at the clock when you are at work. You stay until the job is done. When you've wrapped up what you know you needed to complete that day and there are no pressing issues, you should feel free to head out. If you need to stay longer to get something done, then you stay longer on those days. Again, there is a perfectly reasonable balance you can find between spending too many hours at the office and making sure your work gets done.

But please remember this...the person who is at the office when you get there and is still at the office when you leave isn't a crazed workaholic, they are just someone who wants to make sure they are leaving at the proper time for their workload and personal fulfillment, not necessarily on time. I'm not saying one way is better than the other, just saying let's not improperly label these folks as workaholics because they work a little longer day than most people.



Productivity

Another argument against workahol is that those who researchers label as workaholics are actually less productive than those who they do not label as workaholics. I am going to diverge from all of my previous notions on workahol at this point and begrudgingly agree with the researchers on this one. If you simply have a seat at 8AM and don't get up again until 6PM, there is no way around the fact you were not as productive during those hours as you would have been had you taken a few breaks throughout the day.

Now, don't get me wrong – I understand we all have those days where it is simply impossible to take even a few minutes here and there, but I argue we simply cannot allow this to happen everyday. Even the best of us will have our productivity negatively affected by this behavior. But fortunately, there is an easy way to ensure you are taking these needed small breaks throughout the day.

When you reach a point at which you know your productivity has slowed – and we all know we can recognize when this happens – get up and take a 15 minute break. Leave your desk and walk off or go sit somewhere else for just 15 minutes and you'll find yourself back to renewed productivity upon your return. In fact, what you will find if you truly take a close look is that you will actually accomplish more in a day in which you take these breaks than if you don't. Also, make sure you take at least a 30-minute lunch at some point in the day. Trust me when I tell you taking 30 minutes off at one point in your work day will actually mean way more than 30 minutes of additional productivity to you and your tasks at hand. You'll actually get more done by taking the 30 minutes than if you don't.

But, if you find yourself in a scenario where it is impossible to NOT work for 15 and 30 minutes at a time, I propose you find a task or two you can accomplish away from your desk or work area and do those tasks somewhere else - in a different room, outside, or even while walking somewhere. You're still getting a task done, but at least you're in a different setting or getting a little movement. While not a complete break from working, this change will still help increase your productivity.

Leaving Work At The Office

It's Saturday, you're at a little league baseball game and you get a great idea you don't want to lose. Take out your device, type down the idea and then get back to the game. Pick up the phone and call whom you need to call, have a quick conversation, then get back to the game. This is all perfectly reasonable. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. You're not obsessed with work. You're not putting work before your family. You simply had an idea and don't want to lose it. Now, if you miss the entire two-hour game while you're on the phone or writing an entire proposal on your new idea, then you might need to make some changes, but again, I know you can find a reasonable balance here. You can find the time to watch the game, find the time to relax even a few hours here and there on the weekend, but also still stay focused on your life's work.

Now, when things are pressing, it is also perfectly reasonable to attend certain life events and have conversations or truly participate in the event while still working. The key here, once again, is to be reasonable. If you're at home on the couch, watching TV, you can still have a perfectly sustainable conversation with your loved ones with a laptop on your lap. When you're at someone's house for the holidays or a birthday party and you're there for hours, it's also perfectly reasonable and acceptable to get a little work done. If you're at a dance recital at a school, watching a movie or attending a church service, then maybe it's not so reasonable. If you're out at an everyday routine dinner, it might be reasonable, but if you're at a fancy restaurant for your anniversary, it's probably not reasonable.

Again, the key to working away from the office, even when things are pressing, is to be reasonable. We all know what is reasonable and what is not. Listen to the voice of reason in your head and follow it's advice. At the same time, to all of you detractors of constantly working out there, when you see someone doing a little work at a little league game or when they're over at your house for a bit, don't start up with the "workaholic" label. Some of us choose to get a little work done during our down time, and trust me when I tell you, we are perfectly capable of paying attention to you with a laptop on our lap, otherwise, we wouldn't be doing it.

Strained Social Relationships

For the next section, I am going to pull out the words from the article I read exactly as they appear: *Working too much puts tension on relationships. Divorce rates are 40 percent higher for couples with at least one workaholic partner, Forbes reported. Friends and family members of workaholics may feel like the person is never around, or when they are, do not care about anything other than work.*



Strained Social Relationships

Oh no! How scary! Once again, I feel we really have a scenario where the “strained social relationships” the article cites are not the product of working, but the product of personal choice. 40% of marriages where at least one person is a workaholic end in divorce. Is this because one person is constantly working, or is it because one person who is a workaholic and another person who is not a workaholic married each other? I’d argue the gap in couples’ view on working has a lot more to do with these divorces than the actual act of working itself.

Now, I’m not saying navigating the landscape of your personal relationships when it comes to constantly working isn’t going to take a lot of communication and effort – I am just saying before we all point to the ills of every relationship and blame them on a person working too much, let’s actually take a look at the root cause of the problem. Is your partner working too much the problem, or does the problem stem from your choice to be with someone you feel works too much? Maybe you’d be better off with a partner who works exactly as much as you think is reasonable. Maybe your partner would be better off with someone who thinks they work just the right amount. What I am saying is humans should take the time to look at work and relationship choices in a reasonable way. The amount someone works and his or her views on that amount should be a factor in determining whether or not to be in a relationship with that person BEFORE entering the relationship. That makes sense, doesn’t it?

I argue there is a perfectly acceptable amount of work you can do to ensure you are getting the job done while still making time for your spouse, family, friends, and all of the other personal relationships in your life. Each of us knows what needs attention and each of us knows what we need to do to attend to what needs attention. Again, listen to the voice of reason in your head. It’s there for a reason.



In Conclusion

It's Not Rocket Science...Be Reasonable

I've taken some time away from working to counter the arguments that constantly working is a problem. I argue it is perfectly easy to find a great work-life balance by just being reasonable. Work 10 hours a day, not 18. Go to the family events you need to, but feel free to duck out when you need to handle your business. Take a few breaks throughout the day, eat lunch, and just try to eat some healthy stuff. Find a way to combine exercise with a task you must do each and every day. Listen to the people around you who actually understand why you work as much as you do and hear them out. Ignore the whiners who think you just work too much, but don't understand why. Each of us has been blessed with the mental fortitude to know what behaviors are destructive and which are productive. Listen to yourself – you know what's best.

And wear the workaholic badge society's whiners want to hang on you with honor. My name is William and I am a workaholic. Yet, somehow, despite the massive whining by society about how horrible that is, I live a good, productive life, have wonderful, rewarding relationships at both work and home, am the healthiest I've been in 20 years, and have developed this fantastic ability to sit with a laptop on my lap, working, while still listening and completely understanding what people say to me, especially when they are telling about their day. I smile when people ask me, "How do you do it?" and respond by saying, "I do nothing extraordinary and what I do, everyone else in the world can also do. I am no one special." And I simply smile when they say, "You work too much!" because I know somehow while constantly working, I have still managed to do so much more in life than just work.



About

William L. Savastano is a business professional and two time Society for Technical Communication Award Winner with over two decades of experience in the corporate arena. William trained extensively in advertising and marketing copywriting, technical writing, journalism, and both print and electronic publishing. William's body of work includes a large volume of marketing content, collateral materials, websites, operating manuals, technical manuals, as well as inclusion in national publications and a number of published poems and short stories.

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