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Columnist

Professional Development

Are you a Confirmed or Reluctant Workaholic?

It seems there are two types of people: Confirmed Workaholics who love to work and don't know what to do with themselves otherwise and those I call Reluctant Workaholics who feel forced to work long hours and are stressed because they lack balance in their lives.

I had the pleasure of speaking to a group of accounting majors at Clemson University last month on work/life balance. The following week I spoke to a women's group in Simpsonville on the same subject.

We would expect many of the issues facing college students and working women to be different. Yet both groups have some of the same challenges in everyday living.

With both groups, the participants made a list of the things they're doing, or not doing, that keep them from enjoying life to its fullest. Here's a list of behaviors they see as negative tendencies:

- Poor time management. This one seems to underlie the others or at least relate to most of them. We all have the same amount of time; it's what we do with it that determines our success and happiness. Steven Covey expressed it best when he said we shouldn't call it time management, but rather self-management.

- Failure to prioritize. There's so much to do in a day we sometimes feel everything is a priority and try to do too much and end up not doing what's important. Sometimes while working on one project, we let thoughts of others weigh on our minds so that we can't be productive. The solution is to plan ahead, decide what's most important to do that day, and let the other tasks wait. One thing that helps is to decide first what are the most important areas of your work and life you need to work on at the moment. Then choose a day for each and do only that one. This will relieve any guilt you have about not doing the other things, because you've set aside the time to do them later.

- The inability to say no, trying to please everyone. We want to be nice and helpful to others, so whenever anyone asks something of us, we "cain't say no." This can make it impossible to prioritize or manage our own lives. People who do this tend to become resentful, yet they won't say anything and suffer silently. In the end, everyone loses. These people must realize they're not bad people for saying no when

taking on another responsibility will cause them stress. No one can save the whole world.

- Procrastination. Do we ever put off the things we really want to do? Not often. We procrastinate about things we don't want to do and then feel guilty or worthless. Ask yourself which is worse, putting something off or the way you feel about yourself when you don't do something you need to do? You have three choices: Do it, Delegate it, or if it's not necessary, Dump it. And feel good about whichever you choose.

- Choosing fun over work. This is so tempting; we're all guilty of doing it and it's all right once in a while. The problem comes when we always choose to do fun stuff and neglect our work. Do the work, then reward yourself with something fun. I'll repeat what I said in a previous column. Don't say, "I have to do this (chore)." Say, "I get to do it."

- Perfectionism. The roots of perfectionism are positive. We all want to do and be our best; doing things sloppily or halfway lacks integrity. The problem comes when we allow ourselves to become frustrated because everything doesn't work out exactly the way we want. We must realize that life isn't perfect on this plane and while we should strive for perfection, we should allow room for error.

- Trying to do everything. This relates to perfectionism and the inability to say no. We must learn to pace ourselves and do what's most important. Relax and enjoy life. It's the only one you have at present.

- Being too detail-oriented. Those who have this tendency experience first-hand the old saying, "the devil's in the details." It's another form of perfectionism and stems from the fear of making a bad decision by not having all the facts. Of course, the opposite tendency to ignore details gets us in trouble, too. Balance is the key.

- Not getting enough sleep. This seems to be a national pastime that even Reluctant Workaholics experience. Taking care of our minds and bodies is the most important thing we can do if we want to accomplish anything. If you're working or playing too much and neglecting your rest, cut something out and take care of yourself.

- Negative attitude. This includes our own and others.' People with a positive attitude enjoy life even when things are going wrong. If you have a tendency to think the worst, stop doing it now. Surrounding yourself with positive people will help.

I'll leave you with this thought: We're all doing the best we can, even when we know we're not.

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