

Are You Addicted to Your Job?

By Marsha Sinetar

The majority work to make a living; some work to acquire wealth or fame, while a few work because there is something within them which demands expression. . . . Only a few truly love it.

— Edmond Boreaux Szekely

SUPREMELY WELL-DEVELOPED personalities, expressing themselves through work, can be misunderstood. Their way is not without problems. The individual might feel subjective exaltation and joyousness in doing his chosen vocation. He may see himself growing stronger as a distinctive personality. His fearfulness, timidity, and self-consciousness may gradually disappear in the process of his work and life. And his perceptual field may grow whole from his new, unitive understanding of himself in relationship to his work and to others. But there are still difficulties along the path, such as the negative reactions of other people, the lack of time in a given day to do all that needs to be done, and the desire to give oneself fully to the work yet meet all other responsibilities.

In examining the actualizing person at work, we find attitudes and values that contradict much of what our majority Western culture holds as "normal." We are cautioned not to work too hard or too much. Today people view work as something set apart, something done from Monday through Friday — a compartmentalized bit of life, with most of the "fun" times, the "best" times, reserved for weekends, holidays, and vacations. The phrases "Thank God it's Friday" and "It's a blue Monday" have emerged

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from the idea that the week is filled with drudgery and hard, thankless toil, and that weekends are the most — or the only — refreshing times of life. Sadly, for many people this is true not only at the idea level, but at the level of their direct experience.

Perhaps these ideas evolved out of the Puritan ethic, which kept people's noses to the grindstone, grimly slaving away from sunrise till sunset. A respite was needed — not so much from the work as from the attitudes behind the work, which were based on a deep antipathy to joy and playfulness. The Western concept of controlling nature, our love and fascination with "progress," our admiration of material success and victory over obstacles have helped us equate work with those tasks and activities by which we shape and control external things: nature, time, and the enemies of life — poverty, blight, a ferocious landscape, illness, the limitations of geographic distance and space. It would be natural to want to rest after channeling one's anger and anxieties toward work projects such as these. Viewed in this way, work becomes

What is the difference between a "workaholic" and someone who loves his work? The person who loves his work is drawn magnetically to that work, as if there were a pull or a perfect "fit" between it and himself; the motivation of the workaholic is usually fear.

something cut off from the self, a survival vehicle and an avenue of activity that can make a person bitter, tired, or cynical. Work then fragments and splits the personality, instead of integrating it.

But this is certainly a far cry from the actualizing person's view of work. He sees work as a joyful exercise, a calling that is almost effortless. For him, work becomes a way in which to understand life around him, a resolver of paradoxes and a path for personal development. For him, work is a creative, graceful, present-moment experience. This is in line with the Buddhist perspective, which uses simple, daily routines as a way to grow, as a way to maintain an elegant, concentrated connection with the world, and as a way to see the self as having a place in the scheme of things.

The actualizing individual has a different posture about his work, a posture that includes these patterns:

- Work itself is playful and fun, an activity that permits the individual to tune in to deeper, more truthful parts of himself. Work becomes something fulfilling — even with its frustrations and irritations — a joyous event, and an integral part of one's self, expressing itself as naturally as the bird sings its song. In this framework, work is not something upon which to force one's control. Rather, it is an activity that allows the person to be more aware of himself, and of what is happening.
- The self-actualizing person (i.e., integrated, whole, healed, known-to-himself) functions fully in every moment, rather than reserving a special category for some moments as "good" and others as "not good." He does not inhibit, reserve, or withdraw attention, participation, enthusiasm, and energy in order to save these for "better times," such as weekends, holidays, the Monday night ballgame, and so on. The individual is fully there at work and makes use of all his energy and concentrative/creative abilities.
- Work thus becomes a natural ele-

ment, a fulfilling expression of the life force within the person. Even with its ups and downs, time demands, pressures, and conflicts, work is experienced as pleasurable — something to be done both as personal calling or destiny and as the activity that helps one grow into a better, more enlightened, perfected, capable, trustworthy, committed human being.

- Work is something connected to the self, a part of the spirit, mind, body, and senses — a mirror of the person. It is neither good nor bad in the judgmental sense of one job being better than another, but rather is “right,” “correct,” nonmaterialistically, in that it is simply what makes sense to that particular person’s life in an organic, synergistic context.

- This person’s work allows his weaknesses to be worked on while his strengths and talents grow into full use, and while he is linked to others. As work opens him up to himself, creating more angles, edges, and distinctiveness in the individual, it simultaneously teaches him to be more like others. It teaches him to be a compassionate, functioning, contributive, disciplined part of the whole — a better “servant” who dies daily to his “larger self.”

- Work is not something to apply oneself to aggressively, as if it were an enemy. Nor is it something upon which to vent hostile, unresolved feelings of anxiety or resentment. Rather it is an avenue by which to further express the positive, caring, energized, all-present, committed aspects of the individual’s developing personality. These traits push to be expressed — a push from within that comes to be the “is-ness” of being, the more responsible parts of self-urging to be used in the individual’s daily reality.

It is in this connection that the subject of workaholism invariably comes up and I am asked: What is the difference between a “workaholic” and someone who loves his work? While it is true that, on the surface, there often seem to be similarities, at the heart of each work style resides a completely different set of attitudes and motivations.

First, the person who loves his work is drawn magnetically to that work, as if there were a pull or a perfect “fit” between it and himself. The individual develops what I call a committed heart with respect to all the demands, difficulties, and undesirable qualities of the tasks — just as a mother gives no

second thought to the unpleasant tasks in caring for her sick child. Indeed, this is the crux of it: The motivation that ignites the individual is positive, loving, devotional, and earnestly sincere.

On the other hand, the motivation of the workaholic is usually fear. This person is an alienated, anxious, aggressive, stressed individual who typically uses work to stave off buried hostility, maladaptive social attitudes,

and feelings of inadequacy.

For the workaholic, work provides an addictive high similar to a narcotic. It frees him from having to face unresolved personal problems — a bad marriage, say, or unhealthy relationships with his children. His work with its time pressures and responsibilities protects him from seeing and dealing with his inability to be intimate with family or friends, and also perhaps the

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COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Do What You Love, the Money Will Follow

ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO, I began to experience a great longing to change my life. The thought of letting go of what I had — a well-paying, secure job; a beautiful home; friends and family nearby — was truly terrifying. I, who had always clung to outward forms of security, who had wanted guarantees in every part of my life, also ignored the inner dissatisfactions and urgings I felt.

Years before, this prompting from within had started. And I had ignored it. I distracted myself with a respected career and with the inevitable promotions that came my way. I distracted myself even more successfully with an accumulation of material rewards and symbols of success. The unknown was too frightening to me. This, despite the fact that by all outward appearances I was a creative, spontaneous, and enthusiastic person.

In reality, I did not trust myself. I was afraid to cross uncharted, unconventional waters to get to a more desirable place in life, afraid that — when truth be told — I would not have the requisite strength and competence to accomplish what I so dearly wanted. I could not even imagine how to start. While I believed the adage “what man can conceive, he can achieve,” I couldn’t conceive of doing what I knew I would love. My mind clung so desperately to the familiar.

Then one day as I drove to work along beautiful Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, on a smogless, sunny California morning, a startling thought entered my head. It was as clear a thought as if someone was speaking to me: “Do what you love, the money will follow.” At that very moment, I knew I had to, and would, take a leap of faith. I knew I had to, and would, step out, cut myself loose from all those things that seemed to bind me. I knew I would start doing what I most enjoyed: Writing, working with industry instead of public education, and living in the country instead of in the city.

That decision transformed my life. Since that day, I have gradually expanded my role as an educator and as an organizational psychologist. I have added a depth and complexity to my work which I had always hoped I could have — a dimension my intellect thirsted for, but which self-doubt made me believe could not be mine.

Paradoxically, I have also simplified my life. I have relocated to a quiet rural community where I had wanted to live. I am working with people on projects that hold keen creative interest for me. All my material needs are met. I did what I loved, and the money did follow.

—M.S.

How to Contact Your Inner Guide

Many of us believe there is some part of us that is wiser and more mature than the rest of our being. This part is variously called the strong part, the healthy part, the guide, or the inner adviser. Whatever the name, it's often believed that we'd be a lot better off if we paid more attention to this part and took its advice. This part is only an aspect of you, consisting of memories, experiences, and resources that may not be readily available to your everyday self. The inner-adviser technique is a way of getting in touch with this part and being able to discern its messages.

If you want to contact your inner adviser, you have to be open to surprises. Our guides aren't always what we expect. Its gender may not be the same as yours, it may be an animal rather than a person, it may communicate in ways you're not used to, and it may be a tough taskmaster instead of friendly and supportive as you expected. But that isn't surprising. Surely you've had the experience of an inner voice suggesting that you do something — change jobs, leave a lover, not eat the sundae — that the rest of you didn't agree with.

You may feel that this whole adviser business is a bit silly. How ridiculous to seek advice from some made-up character — especially if it's an old cat named Oscar — who gives you suggestions you may not like. Many people feel like this at the start.

But greater comfort soon sets in. It may help to know that some very famous people had what we would call inner guides. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, took a day off each week to listen to his "inner voice." People quickly get used to their guides. We know some people who consult them daily for advice and support on all kinds of issues. The only test of whether having a guide is worthwhile is if it serves your purposes. If you find you're doing better with it than without, then you know the answer.

The following script for tape recording will help you find your guide. Feel free to change our words to better suit you.

Time required: five to seven minutes

As you sit here very relaxed and very much at peace, allow your mind to go to the place where you can meet your guide. Might be your special room, might be the beach, might be someplace else. And as it does this, just be aware of any signs of life. . . . Your adviser may have any kind of shape at all, might be a man or woman, might be a squirrel or bird, might even look like a tree or flower. . . . Doesn't make any difference at all what it looks like, just be aware of any living thing. . . . Allow yourself some time to become aware of this living creature who is your guide. . . . And if you feel you've given yourself enough

time and no living thing appears, it's perfectly acceptable to make one up, to pretend that there's one there and it can be anything you want it to be. . . .

When you imagine a living creature, make contact with it. Introduce yourself and find out its name. You'll probably find that it knows all about you, but it never hurts to be polite. When you want, tell your adviser why you want to have contact and what you'd like to get out of this meeting. . . . You may have a question or two you want it to answer. . . . You can stay with your guide as long as you want. . . .

When you are ready to leave, establish a way of making contact in the future. Make sure you understand clearly where and how you can reach your guide, so that the two of you can continue working. . . . And when you've left your guide, you may want to continue relaxing for a while on your own, so that you can digest what just went on, or you may want to come back to everyday consciousness right away. In either case, when you are ready to come back to reality, you can do so anyway you like, feeling refreshed, alert, and fully functioning, with the knowledge that you have taken an important step toward accomplishing your goals. ☺

— B.Z., A.L.

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inability to play, relax, and just live life fluidly. In other words, he cannot "enjoy." His capacity for joy, for creative, effortless, spontaneous expression, is blocked by his own tension.

As an easy example, the work addict's sensitivity to the changing of the seasons might be dulled by thoughts of what he must do. He is one who cannot take time out to "smell the roses." He cannot, because he is not free to choose. His anxiety and gnawing sense that he may lose control (over self, schedules, problems, etc.) continually pull him back to his office, paperwork, time, calendar, schedules, and demands. He cannot follow the example of Chinese writer Chin Shengt'an and list — for himself and for posterity — his truly happy moments of life. If he did, they would all be working moments.

Almost anyone who devotes himself to a given vocation, and who pours his love and energy into that activity, develops a certain genius in the field: The vocation opens itself up to him in

terms of its truths and principles, it bends itself to his imagery and ideas, it becomes his friend and most able co-creator, building up the person as he invests himself in the work. And any work can serve this purpose, so that whatever it is one chooses to do — done with the right attitude and proper affection — becomes a graceful, joyful activity as well as an ally in life.

In connection with my research, I received a dual letter from a husband and wife team of apple pickers. They each wrote a letter extolling the virtues of apple picking. An introductory note on the wife's letter instructed me to read the husband's letter first, so I quote him first in deference to their wishes:

"We heard of your research and feel we have something to offer you. We both do agricultural work. For 13 years we've picked apples. Twelve of these years were at the same orchard. . . . We don't love apple picking, but I really enjoy it, plus it enables us to live our lives as we choose, and we have not found any other job that suits us better.

"Eighty to 90 percent of our income is from four months of employment. I like to maximize opportunities to be outside, so employment outside fits in very well. Spring and fall are great times to be outside. . . . Picking requires use of the whole body, bending, squatting, stretching — all of which I like. How hard you work is up to you, and payment is by the bushel, so you get reinforced for working faster.

"Usually I feel no pressure from a boss, so a good level of independence exists for me. We work with a crew of pickers, which necessitates a certain amount of cooperation and an opportunity to make friends. Picking is a job we can leave behind when we go home, and . . . it is very important to us to earn money locally in order to maintain a sense of stability and community."

His wife added the following comments about her work in the letter she wrote:

"Being able to work with my husband is important to me. . . . Work is a large part of most people's lives, and
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"How to tell you how much YS means to me? Not hard at all. I just tell you how breathlessly I await each copy, how enthusiastically I tell my friends about it, how quickly I devour the contents. I have thoroughly enjoyed each copy since its first appearance in my mailbox... I thank you for sending YS to me so I can resubscribe to not only your magazine but to your philosophy of the erotic."

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I am glad I can share this with someone I love. Also, I want to repeat my husband's emphasis on being able to work outside. I feel people in the United States are not connected to the land, and this is a part of the source of our problems as a society."

Almost anyone who devotes himself to a given vocation, and who pours his love and energy into that activity, develops a certain genius in the field.

Both of these individuals contradict the popular misconceptions about "nonprofessional" work, showing us why their work is so well suited to them. Both also disclose a good understanding of what they need from life, as well as from work, and certainly express a strong sense of identity and self-knowledge.

In my discussions with others like them, I have found that in order to have a positive, mature, and personally helpful attitude about doing work the individual must first be aware of having a *distinct self*, a self that is able to choose, a self whose reality is clearly understood and appreciated and worth making some sacrifices for. It is this understanding of the self as distinctive that precedes and produces life's constructive actions.

A certain detachment is involved at this level of personality development — a detachment that makes one able to be objective to one's self as well as to the dictates and expectations of society. Only the person who acts and chooses authentically brings a vitality, a uniqueness, and a spontaneous richness to his activities. It is through this energy — for want of a better word — through his essential connectedness to self that the individual serves the other. And, ultimately, it is through service to self and others that we become fully human. ☺

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