

Burnout

*Without work, all life goes rotten.
But when work is soulless,
life stifles and dies.*

Albert Camus

The door opened and the Accounting Manager made his way into the Bodhi Tree Café and took a seat at the counter.

“I’ve got a question for you,” the Accounting Manger began after Buddy had taken his order.

“Just one?” Buddy asked.

The Accounting Manager sighed before continuing. “I think I’m working too hard.”

“That sounds more like a statement than a question,” Buddy replied with a smile.

“I know, but it’s difficult to explain. I like my job, but at the same time I hate my job.”

“Maybe you’re a workaholic,” Buddy suggested.

“I don’t know. I don’t think so...Well, maybe. I do work long hours and put in time on the weekends, but that’s because the job requires it.”

“It’s important that we work and pay our bills,” Buddy began, “but work can never take the place of family and friends. Work becomes an addiction for a workaholic and, like all addictions, anything that takes control of our lives is eventually going to cause us suffering. Eventually work becomes all that’s important to a workaholic, usually at the expense of his personal life.”

“Oh no, my family and friends are definitely important to me, it just seems like I never have time for them because I’m always working.”

“Then it sounds to me like you are suffering from a fairly

common workplace ailment, burnout.”

“I guess you’re probably right, but what choice do I have? As you said, I need to work to pay the bills.”

“Actually, there are two different causes for burnout and the first thing you need to determine is which category you fall into.”

“I didn’t know it would be this complicated.”

“It’s really not. The first type of burnout occurs to those working in a job where they find themselves putting in a lot of extra hours. They may actually enjoy the work, but the job leaves no time for anything else in their lives and eventually their personal life suffers. The second source of burnout occurs from a job that just grinds you down emotionally. You may not be putting in any extra hours, but the hours you are putting in are making you miserable -- usually there’s a lot of repetition or stress involved.”

“Well, it sounds like I suffer more from the first type of burnout, although I have to admit that there are days when the stress of the job can definitely effect me emotionally. It figures, there are two kinds of burnout and I suffer from both of them.”

“Actually, that’s fairly common. Fortunately, there is a solution to both types of burnout.”

“Sure, it’s called quitting and finding a better job.”

“Well, that is one solution, but there is no guarantee that the new job will be any better than your current one.”

“Well then, how do I prevent burnout?”

“The solution,” Buddy explained, “is by putting balance in your life.”

“But how do I get balance in my life when my job requires that I put in a lot of extra hours?”

“There are countless valid reasons why we have to put in extra time at work,” Buddy explained. “The trick is to not become so caught up in the pattern of putting in extra hours that it becomes a habit. Some people actually get in a rut where they convince themselves that because they put 60 hours in last week, if they only put 50 hours in this week they must be slacking off.”

The Accounting Manager nodded knowingly. “I’ve actually caught myself in a similar train of thought: if I leave on time people will think I’m not working hard.”

“Sure, we often act according to how we think other people will perceive our actions. Of course, often it’s just our own crazy thoughts running wild and having no basis in reality,” Buddy suggested.

“But sometimes it might not be so crazy.”

“True, but how many times have you found yourself awake in the middle of the night and staring at the ceiling, worrying about a situation or confrontation that never takes place.”

“Wow, it’s like you can see inside my head! I do that all the time.”

“It’s not just you, it’s human nature. Our negative thoughts have a habit of blowing themselves out of proportion.”

“So now I have to work on controlling my thoughts as well as changing my work habits.”

“You could begin by practicing what is known as ‘living in the moment.’ Simply put, that means that when you are at work you concentrate on your job and when you’re not at work you concentrate on your family and friends.”

“I see where you’re going with this. If I’m with my family but I’m worrying about what I need to do next at work, then I’m not really enjoying the time with my family.”

“And if you are at work but thinking about what you could be doing with your family then you’re making your job more difficult.”

“Okay, let me see if I’ve got this straight. There is a difference between being a workaholic and having burnout. A workaholic wants to put his work above everything else while someone suffering from burnout feels like he is forced to put his job first. And there are two kinds of burnout, one that occurs from putting in so many hours at work that your personal life suffers, and one from working at a job that beats you down emotionally.”

“Good, and what are the three things you can do to improve your situation?” Buddy asked.

The accounting Manager thought for a moment. “I can do a better job controlling my thoughts, I can learn to live in the moment and I can add more balance to my life.”

