

## Overcommitted Balancing Being and Doing in A World That Values Busyness

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"You just have really bad luck," my friend said to me. I had just shared with her my recent news of my pending layoff. In 2 weeks, my contract was going to end and I would be out of a job.

To me, it had nothing to do with a dearth of good fortune. I had felt for a while that my dead end job was dwindling down to a close and that it was time to move on. The only problem was that I didn't have my next move figured out yet.

Three months later, I was fully immersed in unemployment. Time was abundant.

Empty days and weeks lay before me like a blank book waiting for a story to be written in its pages.

When I wasn't looking for jobs, I was hard at work on my own self-improvement and my dream of building an online business. I started working with a business coach. I was seeing a healer on a weekly basis and I read and studied self-improvement books nonstop.

I took many long walks alone in nature and joined a support group. I spent considerable time on my physical fitness, rode my bike for hours, did daily sitting meditation and cooked healthy food. Life was quiet and I learned to value the gift of having so much empty space.

My constant concern about my lack of income was juxtaposed with a feeling of peace I was cultivating in other areas of life.

It was during this time that I learned to simply be. No one needed me. No one was vying for my attention. My email inbox was relatively quiet and few people called me. I learned a lot during this time. I learned to enjoy my own company and to be very present during a time that was financially tenuous.

My situation was in stark contrast to that of many of my peers. "I'm so busy!" I heard on a regular basis. "Like, crazy busy," and "I have so many clients calling me I started a waiting list!" Ah, yes. Bragging cleverly disguised as a complaint.

Hearing these words made me fiercely envious. Of course I wanted a piece of that life. I was longing for a breakthrough and despite my efforts to heal myself, nothing had changed on the outside.

Three and a half years later I've come full circle. Gone are the days of an empty calendar. In its place is a schedule that's full of work, projects, presentations and errands. A quick glance at my calendar and it's easy to see that I'm overcommitted. Now I'm the one exclaiming how busy I am.

"I don't even have time to eat!" I say exuberantly as I load up my car for my next couple of jobs, a protein bar in one hand and the phone cradled between my ear and my shoulder. I'll be honest. There's a part of me that secretly likes this and another part that feels guilty for neglecting my self-care and health.

Having been on both sides of the busyness equation I understand the subtle overlays of status, importance and purpose we feel when we're busy. In a strange way, it feels good to be put-upon.

The beep, ding and buzz of email and text messages give us a squirt of dopamine and act as reward and positive reinforcement. Our cerebral cortex, now bathed in this feel-good chemical cocktail glows with excitement and readiness for the next task on the list.

It feels awesome to be needed, to have a clear purpose and to be busy. However, when we allow our responsibilities at work or home, our title or the letters after our name to define us, we can easily go astray. These external metrics can easily serve as a false sense of self if we don't already feel an inherent sense of worthiness.

Even if we are cognizant of this internal dynamic, sometimes we still willingly participate, only to feel a sense of loneliness or emptiness take hold when our calendar becomes momentarily vacant.

When we neglect giving our physical bodies exercise, proper rest or good nutrition because we *just don't have time*, we also suffer. The body puts up with substandard care until eventually it manifests an injury, illness or a cold to finally get us to stop, be present and take better care of it.

The equation we internalize is that when we're in demand, we have high self worth. If we're not in demand, our self-worth is diminished. In other words, *doing* equates to value and *being* is tantamount to laziness, and for many of us, laziness is cloaked in shame.

We seldom if ever hear anyone brag about how no one is blowing up their phone, how few emails they get, or about how they have an abundance of solitude. Such proclamations would be met with sharp judgment from those whose identities are propped up on demanding schedules.

Rather, we tend to talk about our overflowing schedules with a sense of pride. And for some of us, this is from where we derive our sense of identity, our self worth and purpose.

Here's the thing: *there's nothing wrong with being busy or having a lot of free time.* Where we get into trouble is when we place judgment on one over the other and cling to it to avoid feelings of shame.

Life has cycles of busyness and idleness. Each offers its own set of challenges and growth. Learning to be content with being is a process that sometimes comes easily and other times is painful minute to minute. Similarly, learning to skillfully manage competing obligations requires practice, diligence and intense focus.

We shouldn't discount the value of idleness. It's indispensable to the body and mind and is what gives birth to productivity and innovation. Without it we cannot continue to run the engine of ingenuity and creativity. It is from this downtime that we recharge, replenish and ready ourselves for another round of high-energy output.

Finding this delicate balance between effort and non-effort, doing and non-doing is hard to pin down and easily disrupted, but must always be something we strive for.

Striking this delicate balance is something I work on every day. At the end of each day I have the choice to feel stress about what I didn't get done and have yet to do, or I can focus on the emotional connections I developed with others, the shared laughs, deep conversations and the new insights I received. I prefer to go through my life relishing the sweetness of being, the subtle connections and relinquishing the status of over the top busyness.

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