

## Do Workaholics Make Good Employees?

Some workplaces are under a false impression that workaholics make the best employees. After all, they are willing to put in long hours, work weekends and generally put work ahead of everything else in their lives. What employer would not want that in an employee?

What employers may not realize (at least at first) is that long hours do not always translate into increased productivity. Workaholics may volunteer for more work than they can realistically complete, generating crises when finally forced to admit that they cannot do it all. Workaholics may spend long hours at their desk, spinning their wheels in a mental fog because they are too depleted to function at full capacity. A workaholic manager may drive away valuable coworkers by making unreasonable demands, thereby increasing costs to the employer by needing to rehire and retrain new employees. Exhaustion and stress can be counter-productive for intuitive innovation that is in sync with the marketplace, and ultimately can lead to mental or physical breakdowns or illnesses.

Those of us who have entered a Twelve-Step recovery program for workaholism (Workaholics Anonymous) find that we are better employees, colleagues and managers in recovery than when we were active in our addiction. We accomplish more, while working fewer hours. We become better collaborators and learn to delegate. We become valued members of our teams and advance in our careers. We provide more valuable work for our employers.

## What Is Workaholism?

Workaholism is not often viewed as a serious addiction like alcoholism or drug addiction. Some employers even consider workaholism a desired characteristic. Untreated work addiction, however, causes grave harm.

Like any other addiction, workaholism is progressive and ultimately fatal. It is a behavioral addiction: the inability to stop working or to keep rational work hours. It is also a substance addiction: workaholics are adrenaline addicts, who get high off the rush of waiting until the last minute

to meet a deadline, working all night or cramming too many projects into their schedules. Workaholics may struggle with additional addictions such as alcoholism, eating disorders or an addiction to technology.

Like alcoholism, drug addiction or any pattern of addictive behavior, workaholism is destructive to workaholics and those around them. Over time, work addiction takes a toll on mental and physical health as workaholics neglect relationships, family, rest, exercise and healthy eating. Contrary to what an employer might expect, workaholism actually increases the financial burden on employers through increased health emergencies and health costs.

## What Are the Symptoms of Workaholism?

It is not uncommon for an employee to put in long hours to meet a pressing deadline or finish a big project from time to time. This is not necessarily a sign of workaholism.

Signs of workaholism to watch for in employees:

- Works much later or arrives much earlier than other coworkers on a regular basis
- Continues to work long hours, even after being told by supervisors to go home
- Hoards work by taking on a large number of projects, often more than they can complete
- Fails to delegate or share work
- Is more excited when talking about work than any other topic
- Consistently works through lunch
- Works during vacations or fails to take them
- Consistently comes to work ill, infecting others and harming their own health
- Demands perfection and unreasonably high standards from themselves or others
- Finds it hard to enjoy or find meaning in non-work activities
- Puts tremendous pressure on themselves to work quickly and accomplish unrealistic deadlines
- Does not set boundaries or say "no" when asked to take on more and more work

Each individual must decide whether they have a problem with workaholism (activity) addiction. An

employee who answers "yes" to three or more of these 20 questions may benefit from the Workaholics Anonymous program:

1. Are you more drawn to your work or activity than close relationships, rest, etc.?
2. Are there times when you are motivated and push through tasks when you do not even want to and other times when you procrastinate and avoid them when you would prefer to get things done ("work anorexia")?
3. Do you take work with you to bed? On weekends? On vacation?
4. Are you more comfortable talking about your work than other topics?
5. Do you pull all-nighters?
6. Do you resent your work or the people at your workplace for imposing so many pressures on you?
7. Do you avoid intimacy with others and/or yourself?
8. Do you resist rest when tired and use stimulants to stay awake longer?
9. Do you take on extra work or volunteer commitments because you are concerned that things will not otherwise get done?
10. Do you regularly underestimate how long something will take, then rush to complete it?
11. Do you immerse yourself in activities to change how you feel or avoid grief, anxiety and shame?
12. Do you get impatient with people who have other priorities besides work?
13. Are you afraid that if you do not work hard all the time, you will lose your job or be a failure?
14. Do you fear success, failure, criticism, burnout, financial insecurity or not having enough time?
15. Do you try to multitask to get more done?
16. Do you get irritated when people ask you to stop doing what you are doing in order to do something else?
17. Have your long hours caused injury to your health or relationships?
18. Do you think about work or other tasks while driving, conversing, falling asleep or sleeping?
19. Do you feel agitated when you are idle and/or hopeless that you will ever find balance?
20. Do you feel like a slave to your email, texts or other technology?

## What Does Recovery from Workaholism Look Like?

Workaholics come to recovery in different ways and from different places. Some are so burned out physically or emotionally from years of stress, overwork and lack of self-care that they need a temporary leave of absence. Like other addicts, workaholics sometimes find help, in the initial stages of their recovery, from inpatient treatment programs.

Some workaholics may need to work restricted hours for a time while they recover their energy and sense of balance. Others may find that they are able to gradually shift to a more normal work schedule as they follow a program of recovery.

Workaholics in recovery make committed, reliable and productive team members. When you support a workaholic in recovery, you help him or her become a better worker and employee.

## Creating a Healthy Work Environment

If some of the signs of workaholic behavior listed above sound like normal operating procedure for your organization, you may want to consider making changes that support a healthy work environment.

While many startups and high-tech firms pride themselves on a caffeine-rush, fast-paced work culture, this is not a sustainable strategy for long-term organizational success. Non-profits may be even more susceptible to excessive work demands. If you are saving the world, how can you take a vacation?

In the long run, a workaholic environment can become unhealthy for employees and organizations. Here are some steps you might take to support healthy work habits for all employees:

- Create policies that limit work calls and emails outside of regular work hours, and respect employees' time off
- Hire enough personnel to complete the required tasks, fill vacancies as quickly as possible, and create time and work saving processes

- Do not ask employees to take on an unreasonable workload or several extra duties or projects; do encourage realistic deadlines or projects
- Have managers set the tone by working a normal schedule
- Do not pressure employees to work overtime more than occasionally
- Do not reward workaholic behavior ("Look at Alex, she always works 14-hour days!") or penalize employees who work their expected schedules
- Support policies that encourage employees to use their vacation time and to stay home when sick
- Enforce policies for employees to take breaks for lunch and at other times
- Incorporate wellness programs such as yoga, or encourage employees to spend 15 minutes walking after lunch

Encouraging employees to have a work/life balance can lead to a more effective and productive workforce.

## Help for Workaholics

Workaholics Anonymous (W.A.) is a fellowship of individuals who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problems and help others to recover from workaholism. Recovering workaholics have found that working a Twelve-Step program of recovery can bring complete relief from workaholism and allow them to live full and productive lives.

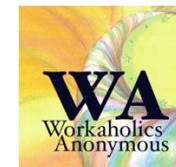
We offer face-to-face meetings in many cities around the world. In addition, there are meetings on the telephone, via Skype, Zoom and online almost every day of the week. You can find a full list of W.A. meetings at <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/meetings/wa-meetings>

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# Workaholics Anonymous

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