

7 signs you're a workaholic – and how to avoid professional burn out

Auckland, 24 October 2017 – All professionals have times when the workaholic lifestyle feels like the only way to get through the week, especially when the duties are demanding. But where exactly do you need to draw the line? Having a strong work ethic is one thing – being unable to switch off and unwind is very much another.

Megan Alexander, General Manager of Robert Half New Zealand said: *“Any bona fide workaholic will tell you hard work pays off. Sometimes working overly long hours and even catching up on work on the weekends just sneaks up on you. This may often be perceived as routine devotion to your job, however an all-hours approach to your job where you’re available 24/7 can have a serious impact on your work-life balance.”*

“Working non-stop and feeling uncomfortable at the thought of taking annual leave for a holiday can lead to an unhealthy form of workaholism – which in the long run can be unproductive and unrewarding. Fatigued and exhausted employees are little use to their organisation, so while putting in the extra hours might seem like a good idea initially, it won't be long before you're at risk of burn out.”

Here are the early warning signs you could be a workaholic:

1. You're first to arrive...and last to leave

Are you the first person to arrive at the office in the morning? This isn't in itself a bad thing – professionals often find they are most productive at the start of the day, particularly when there are fewer distractions in a quiet workplace. But if you're also the one also switching off the lights at night due to working overtime, then there may be a problem. Rather than working harder or longer hours, employees would be best to work smarter and manage their time better so that they can finish on time.

2. You have no hobbies or interests

When was the last time you took part in some sort of activity you enjoy outside of work? Some people spend every waking hour performing employment duties – or when they're not actually working, they're thinking about it.

Always prioritising work over your personal life can have seriously negative consequences, such a diminishing social circle and lack of work-life balance – which just leaves you with colleagues and clients on your contacts list.

3. You're constantly stressed

Sometimes a little stress at work is not a bad thing – it ensures professionals are motivated to complete projects and meet important deadlines. But if you find yourself in a constant state of worry – even when you're not at work – this can become a problem. It's never a good sign for your short or long-term health if you're suffering withdrawal symptoms on the weekends.

4. You never take a lunch break

If you find you've never got the time to take a proper lunch break, ask yourself – is this a voluntary or involuntary decision? If your organisation can't spare you half an hour to sit and eat your lunch, then it needs to think about recruiting additional employees to add capacity. Every working professional needs to give their brain a scheduled rest for up to an hour to sit down and enjoy their lunch.

5. You check your emails every five minutes

There's nothing wrong with a regular check of your inbox while you're at work – it's important to keep on top of your emails. But once you head home for the evening, it's a different matter. Unless it's particularly urgent, you shouldn't be spending your evenings or weekends responding to or sending emails. You're paid to work the allocated hours as set by your employer, not 24 hours, 7 days a week.

6. You get impatient with everyone

It could be the employee who leaves early every Friday or the parent who wants to reduce their hours – do you get frustrated with colleagues who seemingly work fewer hours than you do? Getting impatient and easily feeling frustrated with co-workers or even clients is an indication you might be exceeding certain limits.

7. You have one topic of conversation

You don't know what's happening in the news, what the result of Friday night's footy game was, or even who the prime minister is these days. If it's not work-related, it isn't worth discussing. Once you are in this head space, you should do a sense check as it could be a warning sign you are overdoing it at work. The people around you will easily become bored of you if can't talk about anything else other than your job.

Here are three tips to avoid becoming a workaholic:

- **Time management:** Time is one of your most important resources. We are paid for it, so it makes sense to spend it wisely. This might mean declining non-essential meetings or dedicating time in your calendar to accomplishing one specific task.

With time, there's also opportunity cost to keep in mind; if you're spending it on a less urgent project, you can't spend it on one that could be more impactful. And while a quick procrastination break every now and then never hurt anyone, set end goals to keep your productivity in check.

- **Delegation:** Learning how to delegate is the yin to time management's yang. In other words, you will have more time if you know how to delegate tasks as appropriate. To start, know what requires your expertise and what doesn't. Understand your team's strengths and make good use of them. Finally, be honest about what you can take on. If you feel overwhelmed, be willing to say no or ask for help.
- **Clear boundaries:** Business fluctuates, and there will be times when you have to stay late, perhaps work a Saturday or return an email in the wee hours. But don't make this a habit. Remember why you're working in the first place: to support yourself or your family, and to feel fulfilled, empowered or professionally satisfied.

If you don't want to find yourself in the "live to work" group, create clear boundaries. This may mean leaving by 5 or 6pm each evening, no matter what, or blocking time to work out during your lunch break. It may also mean not checking work email on your personal phone or at all on the weekends.

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MEDIA ALERT

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