



Confessions of a Recovering Workaholic

Summer is over. The languid days of August have melted away. A cool morning breeze reminds you that autumn is already knocking on the door, the seasonal showoff eager to display its vibrant hues of red, orange and gold. You look back on your two-week vacation at the lake and pride yourself on the fact that you called the office just five times, and checked your e-mail only every other day. Your spouse gave you that look that said, "Hang up and remember that you are on vacation!" just twice. You had brought four books you were eager to read, but an urgent project ate up most of your reading time, so you only managed to get half-way through one book. But all-in-all, you thought you handled your vacation well.

If this scenario sounds even vaguely familiar, then Jonathan Lazaar's book, *The Man Who Mistook His Job For A Life: A Chronic Overachiever Finds the Way Home* should be required reading. For many years Lazaar followed the path that most men and women believe is the only one that will lead to success, putting in long hours to build a business. In his case, it was a successful literary agency. Along with his success came the trappings: the large house, the new cars, the healthy bank balance, the expensive vacations.

Then one day Lazaar realized that even as he had built a profitable and successful business, he had done so at the expense of virtually every other part of his life. He had isolated himself in his marriage and found that he barely knew his children. He looked deep within himself and realized that he had become a workaholic.

While many business and professional men and women may think that becoming a workaholic is an admirable goal, Lazaar knew that there was something profoundly unhealthy about his life. Writing this pithy book was his way of wrestling with the compulsive, overachieving demons that lurked within him, as he sought to find a new balance in his life.

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Study after study shows that the vast majority of us put satisfaction, fulfillment and happiness well ahead of money, status or power as priorities in our lives. Yet Lazear observes that we live our lives as though the very act of shifting our cars into reverse to back out of the driveway in the morning also shifts our priorities into reverse.

Lazear argues that many men put in long hours at work because they feel inadequate or unnecessary around the house. He notes that many men feel more comfortable in their work environment than they do at home with their spouse and children. "Work was so much easier, so much clearer, the rules simpler somehow. But home - or life with friends, family or community - was all governed by strange rules, filled with complications and uncertainties ... What was stressful was everything but work. Our jobs, demanding as they were, were actually the safest place to hide from the realities of life." For men, Lazear believes, work is not a place to "hang out" as much as it is a place to "hide out".

It is ironic that while most men strive to put on their toughest "game faces" each day, the wells of fear and insecurity within men are deeper than most would willingly admit. Lazear writes that "one of our fears has always been that if we don't do something, someone else will, and that someone else will leap in front of us and take our glory." Lazear's sensible advice: "Let them." If someone else wants to cut short a family vacation, miss a child's school play, take a business call in the middle of dinner, let them. Work hard, we are told, but structure life so there is balance in it.

One of the strengths of this book is that it is based on personal experience as well as observation. Lazear came to the task with an expert's credentials. As with other such books, Lazear has lists and steps to help each reader determine just how bad his or her work addiction is. The book also provides readers with helpful tools and suggestions for further reading and exploration.

One of the more interesting exercises is a questionnaire from the organization "Dads and Daughters". In less than 15 minutes, the reader can determine how involved or uninvolved he is in his daughter's life. Questions are simple and direct: Can you name your daughter's three best friends? Do you know what school projects she is currently working on? Do you know what your daughter is most concerned about? The same questions could, of

course, be asked about a father's relationship with his son. Honest answers suggest an unhealthy distance between a parent and his or her daughter or son.

We work hard because we believe that with material success comes happiness. But we find that there is more truth than we care to admit in the cliché, money doesn't buy happiness. In his book, *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough* Rabbi Harold Kushner frames the question: "Is happiness, like eternal youth or perpetual motion, a goal that we are not meant to reach, no matter how hard we work for it?" Lazear would say no. But to find happiness may require setting new priorities.

Lazear summarizes his argument: "Work protects us from having to live a full life." Our reasons for working are diverse, but ultimately, life is not restricted to what we do to earn a living; it is everything we do. Most important, it is about relationships, especially with husbands and wives, sons and daughters. To let work interfere with those relationships, Lazear concludes, would indeed be tragic.



Web Links

- [Packing the Sunscreen – Leaving the Laptop: Businessweek.com](#)
- [Workaholics Anonymous \(unofficial site\): Dads and Daughters](#)



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