

## Work addiction

Long office hours, technology-enabled 'out of hours' working availability and the great social significance placed on success in the workplace all serve to promote work practices that can easily become unhealthy. Against this background, it is often hard for a person to acknowledge an excessive relationship with work as a problem. But it is the relationship with work – not the work itself – that is key.

The work addict needs to feel indispensable, will continually be busy and 'in demand', will be available on the mobile and by email for up to 20 hours a day. They will find turning down work or delegating almost impossible, and those freelancers who are work addicts will be unable to schedule time off, instead being driven to accept any work, and if it is not forthcoming, spend the downtime fretting and worrying, in low self esteem.

The work addict is constantly under stress – either pitching for a project, realising it, completing it or struggling to let it go, whether within a full time job or as a freelancer. Many work addicts are senior and high profile individuals whose identity is entirely centred around their work. These people struggle to relax, switch off, take time out, and even to sleep. They suffer from headaches, anxiety, exhaustion (chronic fatigue), stomach ulcers, burnout and heart attack.

Internalised stress is a silent killer, and when a person is unable to release stress and to take the time to recalibrate their emotional and physical system, the stress will compound itself relentlessly.

The experience of those around the work addict is a valuable barometer of the condition: they will feel neglected and 'second best', and will walk on eggshells around the highly motivated, stressed and busy work addict. Intimacy suffers in the face of this pressure, as do personal relationships with family and friends as the work addict is usually distracted and difficult to pin down.

Although many work addicts benefit financially from their constant striving and investment at work, it is a self defeating pattern of coping where the individual is so involved with being 'in control' that they become emotionally isolated. They experience adrenaline highs and severe angry and depressed lows. Often a work addict will form a one-dimensional world of work. Many work addicts resort to prescription drugs and alcohol to help relieve the tension they experience, and some engage in behavioural processes such as gambling, compulsive or dependent relationships and compulsive exercise in order to cope.

At CHARTER we work on developing a valued sense of self that allows the individual to achieve their full potential without destroying themselves and the relationships around them. The detox period (i.e. time off work spent in treatment) is fraught with an intense anxiety around leaving work aside; it is a challenging process for a work addict to commit to a process of recovery for themselves, as fundamentally, underneath all the powerful image and tough facade, the work addict suffers from intensely low self-worth. In the face of this, the decision to take time off work (the 'drug of choice') and make an investment in themselves as a person rather than the results of their frenetic efforts, is a difficult one: once made, the transformation of a work addicted person's quality of life can be truly astonishing.

If you identify with the characteristics of work addiction, try these two suggestions and see if they help:

- Switch off your phone – find a time in the evening or at a weekend when you commit to turning off your phone for one hour and then gradually increase it so that you have quality time to yourself and your relationship
- Stipulate next weeks work hours in advance and stick to them as best you can – can you keep your own boundaries?

**If you think you suffering from work addiction then give us a call, we can help**

**Call 020 7323 4970**

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