

SPARKING IDEAS AND ACTION IN YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS

HARMONY COACHING & CONSULTING

Overwhelm

Look in any thesaurus, and the synonyms for overwhelm are pretty awful: overpower, subdue, oppress, quash, engulf, swallow, submerge, bury, suffocate.

Groan.

During those times, everything feels too big. It's not just everyday busyness and packed schedules. When we're overwhelmed, making dinner becomes a monumental effort. Better eat out. Bills, housework? Forget it. Tasks that used to take only 10 or 15 minutes now seem utterly impossible. There seems to be no time for anything. So we do nothing.

Worse, we have no faith that this, too, shall pass. We seem hopelessly mired in the quicksand of "too much." We keep trying to will our way out of the quicksand with a will that just wants to lie down.

We live in a very overwhelming time—much more so than in decades past, says Jan Boddie, Ph.D., a California therapist who trains individuals and consults with businesses on the topic.

Things are speeding up. Technology's well-touted time saving seems to have yielded less leisure time, not more. Companies are demanding longer work hours. Many adults are sandwiched between the needs of older and younger generations.

"We have really lost connection, not just with nature, but with our own true human nature," Boddie says. "We're sidetracked. Our lives are in such fast forward that we don't even recognize we might need help until we're drowning."

Part of the problem is the cultural belief system in place, one that overrates doing and achievement and underrates quality of experience and connection with values.

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In that cultural mindset, it's not uncommon for a friend or a magazine article, with all good intention, to suggest the "Nike solution": Just do it. Make priorities. Choose three things and accomplish them quickly. Go through the mail as soon as it arrives. Do a "brain dump" and create a huge to-do list with everything that you can think of on it. Now get started!

Not bad suggestions necessarily, but overcoming overwhelm isn't really about measuring accomplishment. It's about connecting with what has meaning for us, with what feeds and enlivens us.

"Putting on a whole new sense of doing-ness is overwhelming," Boddie says. "It creates a future-based state of mind that never ends because there will always be more to do. Being in relationship with what has meaning is fulfilling in the here and now. Feeling connected then connects us to the natural fuel for getting things done."

Thus, when we come into alignment with our values and needs, we find the inner resources and spaciousness needed to get on with life.

First, however, we need to identify our individual symptoms and triggers for overwhelm. Our symptoms can be physical (e.g., nail biting, clumsiness, neck ache); psychological (forgetful, rude, defensive); social (poor hygiene, inadequate boundaries); or spiritual (loss of sense of purpose, unsure of what's important).

Triggers are just as individual: a deadline, a certain tone of voice, change.

Noticing these symptoms and triggers is like setting off the two-minute warning buzzer: time for intervention techniques. And after we've come back to ourselves, it's time for prevention techniques, such as adequate rest, nutrition, exercise and, as always, connection to purpose.

"The focus that matters is in your heart," Boddie says. "Connect with yourself and then that self can do the tasks."

Quiz: How Well Do You Manage Your Energy?

When the seemingly relentless demands at work and burdens of a busy life take their toll on work performance, we tend to think that managing our time better will improve the situation. If we can just work faster, multitask more efficiently, things will be better, we think, as we buy the latest time management gadget or software.

However, as Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, authors of *The Power of Full Engagement*, explain, it is the skillful management of energy, not time, that most significantly affects high performance. Too often, we squander this valuable resource through energy-taxing habits—physical, emotional, mental and spiritual habits. Take this Self-Quiz to see how well you are managing your energy.

1. I rely on sugary or carbohydrate-rich snacks for bursts of energy when I need an energetic pick-me-up.
2. Life is an endless marathon to be endured; you just have to keep on running.
3. I tend to do what feels immediately pressing and easier to accomplish rather than make intentional choices about how I spend my time and what matters most.
4. I hate routines; they're too much like being stuck in a rut. I prefer to be loose and spontaneous.
5. I'm so busy I rarely have time to reflect on what I value most deeply.
6. I seem to be stuck in overdrive; I feel like I've lost the ability to shift to any other gear.
7. I work out (cardiovascular and weight training) irregularly, if at all.
8. I regularly get less than six hours of sleep.
9. I rarely take breaks; that way, I can get more done.
10. When I take the time to notice, my breathing seems shallow; I seem to go a long time without taking a deep breath.
11. Anxiety, frustration and overwhelm seem ever-present for me.
12. When I'm under pressure, I easily become harsh or defensive with others.

13. Personal relationships are not something I devote a lot of energy to. If they don't work, I move on.

14. I smoke and/or drink; to be honest, doing so really helps lower my anxiety level.

15. It's been a long time since I've done something purely because it was enjoyable or felt good.

16. Downtime is wasted time.

If you answered "true" to more than just a few of these statements, you're probably not performing—or feeling—as well as you could be. If you would like to explore how to live in a way that enhances your energy, not depletes it, don't hesitate to call.

These articles are provided Harmony colleague Marnie E. Green, Principal Consultant of the Chandler, AZ-based Management Education Group, Inc. Green is a speaker, author, and consultant who helps organizations develop confident leaders. Contact Green at phone: 480-705-9394

mail: mgreen@managementeducationgroup.com web



Bill Burtch

PCC, SPHR, SHRM-SCP

1650 Faxon Avenue
Memphis, TN 38112

Tel: 901-272-7390

bburtch@harmonycc.net

www.harmonycc.net

Schedule of Public Courses

The following courses are being offered to the public by Harmony Coaching & Consulting. Click on the associated link for more information on the program or to register.

Course Title	Date(s)	Time	For More Information/Registration
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