

Marriage & Family

Treatment & Action Steps Against Workaholism

Generally, people who are addicted to work feel:

- a. Highly self-critical
- b. A pervading sense of emptiness
- c. A compulsive need to do things perfectly and be better than others
- d. Pain from the past—their worth can only be found in their achievements
- e. Their unrelenting sacrificial service is honorable before God
- f. That they must measure up to their own impossible standards
- g. A constant struggle with pride

Helping the Workaholic:

- a. Communicate unconditional love and avoid evaluative remarks. Initially, affirm the person's inner qualities and the courage to address this issue.
- b. Express empathy about the stress the person is experiencing. Give hope that you will help him find a way through the pressure.
- c. The person may be completely unaware as to what is fueling the stress and find little value in self-reflection. You will need to gently encourage him to explore the factors that are fueling the addictive behavior.
- d. Move the focus from himself and what he feels he must do to have God's unconditional acceptance. God is more concerned about who he is becoming than what he is doing.

Action Steps:

1. Assess the problem:
 - a. What is causing the stress he feels at work? (Help the person perceive the problem and own it).
 - b. Help him understand that workaholism is an addiction and needs to be treated as such.
2. Evaluate the past:
 - a. Identify negative messages he received about self-worth from his parents, siblings, and/or peers.
 - b. Point out that his significance is provided through Christ, not work.
3. Refocus on God:
 - a. Promote daily time for prayer, Scripture reading, and meditation.
 - b. Tell the person that he needs to seek God for guidance as to the activities for the day.
 - c. Encourage him to read and meditation on the Scriptures that address God's unconditional love and his identity as a follower of Jesus Christ. Be

- sure to place this activity in the context of a relationship and not just as another job or task.
4. Find balance:
 - a. Evaluate the activities in his weekly schedule and assess which involvements are unnecessary and are contributing to the addiction to activity.
 - b. Encourage a balance between time spent at work and time spent in close relationships.
 - c. Explain that work must be maintained in proper relation to God and to family. When this balance is not in place, work can become an idol.
 - d. Have the person “schedule” times for leisure and play. Make sure that he treats these times as a priority.
 - e. Encourage him to take a day off each week.
 5. Slow down:
 - a. Help the person establish a slower pace for each day and to seek rest.
 - b. Remind him to honor the body that God has given him by getting sufficient rest, exercise, and eating a nutritionally-balanced diet.
 - c. Explore ways that he can include enjoyable activities in his schedule—especially family time.
 - d. Remind him that change takes time and that God will take care of the things that concern him.
 6. Get support: Encourage him to seek help from a counselor, accountability partner, or group where the focus is on coming to terms with the underlying motivations for the addiction.

Material comes from the American Association of Christian Counselors.