

WORKAHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Logging off from Facebook in the office can lead to a **better work-life balance** (and maybe even make you happier in your job). By Aimee Chan

We all have one common complaint. We spend too much time at work and not enough doing the things we love. How many times a week do you find yourself at your desk still replying to e-mails at 8pm? Or go home to find yourself lying in bed, thinking about the spreadsheet you need to finish in the morning?

Being overworked is not so difficult a problem to solve as you may think. It's not because your boss micro-manages. And it's not because you've got too much work. Like the Hoobastank song says, the reason is you.

Dr Adam Fraser, a researcher and educator in human performance, says it is our mindset that keeps us stuck in the workplace and unable to find happiness. "A lot of people don't like their jobs because they choose that as an attitude," he says.

IT'S ALL ABOUT OUTLOOK

There is no doubt that external factors affect our ability to perform. Maybe all your subordinates are incompetent. Maybe your manager is always criticising you. But, according to Dr Fraser, that's not what makes us unhappy.

"We are in a pattern of behaviour where we just focus on what is wrong. Most people have a pessimistic attitude and many companies have a culture of whinging," he says. "If you ask someone 'What was awesome about today?' they will struggle to think of something. But ask them about the last time they had a bad day and their ability to recall that is unbelievable."

Dr Fraser has spent 11 years working with corporations to help them create a culture of positivity in the workplace in the US, New Zealand, Australia, Thailand and Spain. He has assisted the likes of swimmer Alexander Popov, athlete Colin Jackson and pop singer Guy Sebastian on the psychology of how to improve personal performance. And much of the way we can improve behaviour, he advises, is to focus on our own attitudes.

"If you hate your job — why do you hate your job? Obviously, if your company treats you poorly, then it's hard to enjoy your work. But a lot of people don't like their jobs because they are in the pattern of complaining behaviour."

How we interpret the world determines whether we are pessimists or optimists, says Dr Fraser. And many of us like to make things



permanent, global and external when they are not.

For instance, if a presentation you conduct goes poorly, a pessimist would think: "I am such a loser, this always happens to me. It's because my colleagues didn't help me enough." That, according to Dr Fraser, is letting one experience affect your whole life.

Whereas an optimist might say: "I've had a bad day at work, that hasn't happened to me for a long time. But my family is great." The happiest people have an explanation style that is accurate, realistic and optimistic. And that's what we should be aiming for.

MAKE A CHANGE

We love drama — sometimes there is nothing better than a good bitching session round the water cooler after a staff meeting. But Dr Fraser advises this is part of the cycle that is getting us stuck at work.

"Stop engaging in the communal bitching in the office," he suggests. "It breeds a bad culture. It upsets you and it's unproductive. Don't focus on internal petty issues, which are usually driven by people with a pessimistic mindset."

But to really make a change, we need to do more than just change our behaviour, we have to change how we think as well. "Be more self-aware about your explanation style," recommends Dr Fraser. So if your boss really has been unreasonable, perhaps he's had a bad morning and you chose the wrong time to approach him for that pay rise. "Try to look at the evidence, challenge your negative thoughts and move towards a more positive mindset."

DO MORE WITH LESS

So you've found your inner Zen, you have kept calm, carried on but you still find yourself working late, answering e-mails on the weekends and generally spending too much time being an employee. Even being an optimist doesn't always guarantee you will be efficient at work.

Now that you've silenced all that negative energy in your head, it's time to focus, says Dr Fraser. "Clarify 'What's my intention for today?'" Be clear about what is the most important thing you want to achieve and determine what are the behaviours that will get you there."

Sometimes this means that when you are in employee mode, you will need to commit to it.

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So no social media during office hours (or only at lunchtime) and turn off your e-mail until the task is done. "When your focus is on tasks, you will tend to head towards execution and be more productive."

The reverse is also true — when you're not at work, it's important to have interests to keep your mind engaged and active, which will ultimately make you a better employee. Exercise has several obvious health benefits as well as stress management, strategic thinking (and helping you look better in that new Hervé Lèger dress). But even other social pursuits are important, too.

"Hobbies teach you goal-setting and perseverance," adds Dr Fraser. "To be productive, you've got to have attention management — the ability to be present in whatever you are doing. Focus is crucial for productivity."

All good reasons not to update your Facebook status with a work-related rant and, instead, to spend a few minutes enjoying the aroma of your morning coffee before you complete that PowerPoint presentation. **ELLE**

1 In a world with remote e-mail access, switching off from work to home and back again is actually an acquired skill. So how do you get off the treadmill of finishing your reports on the weekends and worrying about your budgets while in bed?

2 Dr Fraser's latest book *The Third Space* examines strategies for coping with transitions from one role (employee) to another (attentive daughter/friend/friend/wife/mother). Here are his suggestions:

3 Stop that endless cycle of work thoughts and calm you down.

1 What have you achieved, how have you gotten better and what went well?

2 Even if it's listening to your iPod, reading a book or following the Kardashians on Twitter while you're on the bus, time out will help you

3 Identify a specific behaviour you want to aim for when you enter your next role and an attitude you want to exhibit. It might be to walk into your home, greet your husband with a kiss and then tell him a joke, rather than walking into the room and getting upset that he forgot to pick up the dry-cleaning.

The Third Space examines strategies for coping with transitions