

SPOTLIGHT

METAMORPHOSIS FROM A WORKAHOLIC TO A HARD WORKER

At the young age of 19, as I fell in love with work, I would watch others take long vacations, go on beach holidays, travel here and there and I would smirk. Yes, you read that correct. I would smirk thinking how all these people need breaks and vacations, whereas I can work non-stop and I can love it too. And with that thought slowly fading, in the blink of an eye, a stressful six years passed by.

Norwegian researchers from the Department of Psychosocial Science at the University of Bergen, identified specific symptoms that are characteristic of workaholics. The study found that younger workers were most likely to be workaholics. Gender, education level, and marital status did not seem to play a role. Parents, however, were more likely to be affected, compared to those without children. (source: *Forbes.com*)

One night, while crying myself to sleep thinking about the amount of work I put on my own little shoulders, I wondered when the last time was when I didn't go to sleep thinking about work. When was the last time I woke up relaxed? When was the last time I didn't rush out of the house worried about being late? When was the last time I had a fun conversation with my family over breakfast? When was the last time I slept and woke up in peace?

I just couldn't remember.

So I decided to take the plunge. I took a vacation. Or a 'stay-cation' as people nowadays call it- where you don't really go anywhere and stay home most of the times. Being someone who worked for six straight years, I was nervous. I didn't know what I would do with my days. 'Maybe I'll visit and just stay in the office during the daytime,' I would think. My colleagues laughed saying things like, "You took 2 weeks off?? Let's see how long you last!" or "I bet a 100 taka you'll be back by the end of your third day." I took up the challenge and on a sweet Sunday, I began my vacation.

The first three days were terrible. All I could think of was work. "How is the magazine doing?", "Maybe I should call and check with my boss if everything is okay?", "I really don't have much to do, maybe I can help with some editing", "I should write a cover story on this experience,"- these thoughts constantly occupied spaces in my brain.

At one point I had to force myself to stop looking through my mail and phone for work-related material.

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PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

"What is the difference between a hard worker and a workaholic?" is a frequently asked question. A hard worker who is emotionally present for all family members, co-workers and friends, and who manages to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal responsibility is not a workaholic. Any periodic burst of overworking in order to meet an important deadline or an emergency situation needs to be purposely followed by a reduced schedule or days off to restore depleted resources. Making a resolution to save at least twenty-five percent of your energy to bring home every night, and "putting a fence" around your weekends to protect yourself from temptations are both good ideas!

Workaholics, in contrast, lack this wisdom. They are obsessed with their work performance and hooked on an adrenalin-high. Bent on self-aggrandisement, these ego-driven folks reach one goal, and immediately set another more ambitious one. Staying at the same level of accomplishment is considered a failure. (Source: *psychologytoday.com*)



I decided to focus my energy on my niece then. And that's when the magic happened.

I brought back in mind the questions I asked myself the night I realised I wanted to sleep without worry. My family, my friends, my passion barely got any time from me in six years. In 4 year short of a decade, I didn't spend one whole day with my family. In 4 years short of a decade, I rejected meeting with some of my best friends because I chose to work instead. So I made a list of things I wanted to do in these two weeks- mend relationships, bring back passion and hobbies into my life, and...sleep as much as I possibly can. How these would later help, I didn't even know until my vacation was over.

The next day, I sat down and downloaded almost 20 cartoons for my niece who was already addicted to smartphones, tabs and youtube. I sat down with her and watch all of them to make them more interactive for the three year old. I taught her finger-painting and realised how much I love it myself. I laughed with her like I hadn't in 6 years.

My mother and father began trusting me with household chores again as I began setting my priorities straight. I would clean the house, my room and wardrobe- which I hadn't touched in so long (my mother would do all of it when I was gone at work). Breakfast had become the best time of the day, as we would sit and converse for hours since I didn't have the words 'hurry up! Go to work!' banging at the back of my mind. I saw my family smile more often as I became a reason. It was the best thing I felt in a very long time.

I then called up that friend, from that time, who had been waiting on me. Whose phone calls would always meet with an 'I can't, I'm busy' or 'some other time, I have work.'

We went out for lunch; we had a fun sleepover where the mention of work never came up. I felt as relaxed as someone who had just finished their A-Levels.

I read books. A lot of them. I did not have to wait for traffic to get some time to delve into the paper and ink. I did not have to wait till I was done with office, after which I would be too tired to open up a book. I did not have to wait at all. I would pick up a book, open it up

whenever, wherever, get a cup of coffee and read like there was no tomorrow.

I was able to fix my sleep-routine, my brain felt, how do I put it, free of traffic? In two weeks, I felt completely rejuvenated. I felt...free somehow. I felt like I could move. I felt like I could think. But the real effects came afterwards.

Workaholics have a lot of bad habits that can hamper health. Constrained for time, some turn to junk food, some inhale lunch at their desks and others skip meals altogether. Exercise is often abandoned and sleep habits get thrown off schedule. Mental health experts who specifically treat work addicts consistently see the same ailments among the overworked: gastrointestinal problems, headaches and migraines, weight gain or loss due to poor diets, increased irritability and tiredness, heavier drinking as a form of stress relief. (source: *forbes.com*)

When I came back to work, that signature fidgetiness I would have everyday for six years was gone. I was laughing more. It was strange but the good kind. When a problem is now thrown at my way, I do not panic. When my colleagues are stressed, I go to calm them down with laughter. When my boss is worried, I try to help with a smile. I work just as hard as I used to (if I do say so myself), don't get me wrong. But I am calm, I am happy, I take challenges with ease. I learned to give equal priority and time to my family, my friends and my office. Stress was a thing of the past.

Two weeks, just two weeks had changed who I had been for six years. And here, I was afraid of what I would do during my vacation. Whereas, silently, unwillingly, I became the kind of person I always wanted to be- a hard worker, not a workaholic. ■