



Serene Scene

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Workaholism: As Real as it Gets



**By Andrew T. Martin, MBA,
LAADC, SAP, CA-CCS**

Listen Now 

I have heard people describe themselves as workaholics when explaining how they work hard and work long hours. Usually the receiving party gives a chuckle and exclaims their own experience with working too much. I understand that they mean well, but they really do not understand what workaholism is.

Workaholism is a process addiction, an impulse control disorder, and is usually co-occurring with anxiety disorders, depression or narcissism. It changes the personality of the afflicted individual and it has a significant impact on the family system which often leads to divorce.

Barbara Killinger, Ph.D. defines a workaholic as *“a work-obsessed individual who gradually becomes emotionally crippled and addicted to power and control in a compulsive drive to gain approval and public recognition of success”*.

I think it is more than that. Workaholics do work obsessively; they do not pay attention to their feelings

or bodily cues that should warn them of physical exhaustion and hurting those around them. And they do crave recognition because they feel undeserving of their success. But they also can avoid work, choosing to do nothing or to do menial work until the last minute before a perceived catastrophe strikes.

The reason for these behaviors is complex, however one thing appears to be common in all the activities of a workaholic - adrenaline.

To the workaholic the adrenaline is the drug of choice. Working frantically to achieve success, avoiding work until the last second, or participating in risk-taking activities is all a part of workaholism.

When trying to reason with workaholics, it seems that their sense of risk assessment and task management is askew. Workaholics talk fast, eat faster, and are always running late when it comes to their desired schedule and achievement of goals.

One workaholic said, "If I eliminate all the things I am supposed to do, all the things I need to do, and all the things I have to do... there is nothing I want to do."

Strangely, the workaholic feels the need to control every aspect of their lives, and sometimes of other people's lives as well. "If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself" becomes their mantra in life.

When a workaholic does accomplish something significant, they take no time to celebrate or reward themselves, and instead they set another goal and start working on it.

It is easy to understand that this self-imposed pressure and inability to recognize their own mental and physical warning signs eventually results in much larger problems. Common symptoms of workaholism include gastroenterological illness, panic attacks, episodes of rage, claustrophobia, depression, sleep disturbance, muscular injury, and migraine headaches. In extreme cases, the workaholic may only relax when in a hospital bed.

The origins of workaholism are complex and individualized. Many are traumatized by having to take on the role of the parent far too early in life. Others are raised in family environments where conditional love is given based on accomplishment and pride when expectations are exceeded. These experiences mold the workaholic into a few common stereotypes.

The Pleaser: The pleaser can't say no and will do anything anyone asks of them. They are the first to volunteer even though they are already overextended.

The Controller: The controller is the master of all things. They seem to have the right answers and they want things done their way. They are intense and motivated to get things done. Often the controller is impulsive and is usually on the shy side with few intimate friends.

The Narcissistic Controller: Similar to the controller, the narcissistic controller takes on a few additional characteristics. Firstly, they must always be right, and

nobody else matters. They are master manipulators and often sacrifice ethical and moral judgment, and the wellbeing of others. They live in their own world.

Sadly, many workaholics are admired for their accomplishments. Most outsiders never truly understand the suffering the workaholic endures. Most condemn their negative behaviors as those of a jerk or a self-serving, greedy individual.

It often takes disaster for the workaholic to seek help; usually in the form of mental health therapy. If they are lucky, the workaholic will find themselves in front of a therapist that is familiar with process addictions.

Effective interventions include cognitive behavioral therapies and social support groups such as Workaholics Anonymous. Creating bottom line and top line abstinence behaviors is also very helpful.

Because it is not practical for a workaholic to be abstinent from work, there must be a way to allow for work and not abuse work in the process. The workaholic must live a work life but not adrenalize unnecessarily. This is where bottom line and top line behaviors come into practice.

Bottom Lines represent the point at which work becomes work addiction. For example, it may be allowed to work six out of seven days a week, or it may be allowed to work sixty hours in total per week. However, crossing over these bottom lines represents activating the work addiction.

Top Lines represent the workaholic's goals and visions. For example, for the person with a bottom line of working sixty hours per week, a top line may be working forty-five hours per week.

There is hope for workaholics, just as there is hope for all those suffering from addictions. With assistance from informed therapists, the workaholic can enjoy a life free from unnecessary fear and abundant with interpersonal connection and intimacy.

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Andrew Martin began his entrepreneurial approach to business in 1982 at the age of fifteen. Throughout his career, Andrew has fulfilled his duties as a senior executive in viable business ventures in various industries including; health care, sound reinforcement and lighting, electrical safety equipment, commercial catering, specialty metal shapes manufacturing, and the

entertainment overhead suspension industry. Andrew's current business efforts are encompassed by Serene Recovery Network, a group of branded organizations with a common vision of helping people in early recovery to help themselves to a long-term rewarding quality of life without addiction. The individual businesses include Serene Connections, a publishing and professional educational conference production company catering to the field of addiction treatment: The Evolution of Addiction Treatment is the flagship conference. Locate Treatment, an online directory of professionals and organizations affiliated with the treatment of addiction. Serene Foundation, an educational institute for higher level addiction treatment learning. Serene Scene Magazine, a publication promoting long-term healthy lifestyles of recovery. Andrew Serene Institute providing educational opportunities to professionals. Andrew has authored many articles related to addiction treatment, health care agency productivity, industry specialties, as well as business approach and leadership and has been published in Serene Scene Magazine, Behavioral Health, Freedom Newspaper, Sound & Video Contractor, Western Wall and Ceiling Contractors Association Bulletin, Connections Magazine (Australia), dB Magazine, EQ, Lighting & Sound International (Canada), Sound & Communications, Live Sound International (UK), Recording-Engineering-Production. Additionally, many patents and trademarks have been awarded to Andrew Martin for various business related products, brand names, and service marks. Andrew is also very active on boards related to the treatment of addiction. Andrew also keynotes for many organizations and speaks internationally on many topics relating to the treatment of addiction.

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February 2-5, 2017
Los Angeles, CA



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