

Workaholics Anonymous

By: Robin Pascoe

“There was a notice in today’s paper I think you should pay attention to dear,” an expat wife mentioned to her husband one night as she was getting ready for bed. “A community group is sponsoring a new support group for expat men suffering from workaholism.”

“What did you say?” said the husband, shouting from his home office next door to their bedroom. “I’m busy with my e-mail and didn’t hear you.”

“I said there are professionals who may be able to help you slow down a bit. You know, stop you from checking your e-mail when you come home from a dinner party at 1 a.m.”

“Sorry, honey, I can’t stop to talk right now. The phone is ringing and I’m expecting a call from a local supplier.”

“At this time of night?”

When he had finished the call and was about to turn back to his computer to check if any e-mail had arrived in the previous five minutes, the wife once again inquired as to why the call had to take place so late.

“We couldn’t meet today because we both had breakfast meetings, morning meetings, lunch meetings, afternoon meetings and then there was that cocktail reception and dinner party tonight,” he explained.

“Couldn’t you have spoken at the dinner party?” asked the wife. “After all, there were not any women there to interrupt you,” she added with a note of sarcasm.

“Are you still mad about not being invited?” he asked, annoyed.

“No.” It was true too. She had not wanted to attend the party. But seeing her husband would have made a nice change in her routine.

“Look honey, I would love to discuss this, but some new mail has arrived from headquarters that has to be answered immediately.”

“Now? Don’t they know it’s the middle of the night here?”

“Of course they know. But it’s their working day. They wouldn’t want to have to answer my messages late at night.”

Shaking her head in disbelief over her husband’s complete loss of logic, she said: “Will you at least look at the notice in the paper?”

“What notice is that?”

Determined to talk to her husband about the support group for workaholics, the wife waited for him to return the next evening. Time dragged on and on until finally the phone rang.

"I'm in the car on my way to another meeting," said her husband without offering any greeting first.

"Why does this not surprise me?" said the wife.

"Go ahead and eat without me."

"I did," she said. "Two hours ago."

"Is it that late?"

"I need to talk to you."

"Don't wait up. We'll talk tomorrow. It's Saturday."

"But you work on Saturdays."

"Only half a day."

The wife tried to remember when half a day really meant half a day. "I think we really need to talk. You have a serious problem."

"What did you say? The car is going into a tunnel and I'm losing you." The sound became garbled and the line went dead.

"No," said the wife to herself. "I'm afraid of losing you."

The wife had to wait almost two weeks before she had a chance to raise the subject of workaholism again. First her husband had been busy with visitors from headquarters. Then he had to fly off for meetings elsewhere. When he returned, jet-lagged and exhausted, he said reports had to be written immediately about the meetings.

Finally, he decided to take a day off, claiming he just wanted to sleep for twelve hours at least. However, she noticed he was up at the usual time pacing back and forth in front of his home office. He couldn't get inside. She had placed a giant padlock on the door.

"Why are you pacing?" she demanded to know. "This is your day off. Sit still for a minute. Read a book. Go for a walk. Stare at the wall. Just don't pace!"

"I thought I heard a fax come in. Give me the key for that lock."

"No."

"Give me the key! I need it! I forgot to tell you that I'm expecting an important e-mail and it's probably there this very minute."

"Along with 75 other e-mails. No, you cannot go inside there."

"I'm sure I just heard my cellular phone ring inside my briefcase which is inside that room. Give me the key!"

"Would you listen to yourself? You would think there was heroin in there and that you needed a fix."

"I don't have the faintest idea what you are talking about."

"You don't think you are addicted to your work?"

“Addicted?”

Exasperated beyond belief by his denial tactics, the wife handed him the key to the padlock on his office. Sheepishly he took it. “OK. Why don’t you give me that phone number. I’ll call the people organizing that support group for workaholics.”

“Forget it,” said his wife.

“No really. Maybe you’re right. I should do something about my problem.”

“No I meant forget it. Truly. I called for you last week. The group was cancelled.”

“Cancelled?”

“Everyone was too busy working to come.”

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