



The Leadership Journey Work Hard and Play Harder



I am a recovering workaholic. I love, love, love my work and have no problems staying up all night to get work done. However I learned the hard way that all work with no play makes for a very sick and tired leader. One particular incident put me on the path to recovery.

My daughter was treated for cancer from 1995 - 2000. At this time my career was taking off like a shot. I was a new business owner and there was a lot of good buzz around my business. I took care of my daughter, her little brother, served my clients, and even continued to serve on a number of boards. In retrospect I did some of my very best work during this era of my life. I was on a roll! I was a skilled workaholic who proudly operated on 2-3 hours of sleep a night. However during this time I did not acknowledge the toll workaholism was taking on my life. I was

stressed and exhausted. I lied to myself about this every single day. Does this ring a bell with any of my sister and brother leaders out there?

I had the opportunity to meet with a therapist during this time to see how I was holding up in the midst of dealing with pediatric cancer. She asked how I was doing. With the arrogance of a true workaholic, I told her how incredibly successful I was with only 2-3 hours of sleep a night. Immediately following my prideful rant, she looked me square in the eye and said, "Gwen do you think this is normal behavior?" I was shocked. Why was she asking me this question? Doesn't every leader operate on close to no sleep? What's really scary is that I actually believed my behavior was normal.

What an eye opener this was for me. In that moment I realized I and far too many other talented leaders are fueled by anxiety, fear and exhaustion. Shortly after this experience I committed to fuel the balance of my career with rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation. Now my primary professional goal is to be calm. To remain focused on this I adopted a mantra, **I work hard and play harder.**

Workaholism is harmful to effective leadership because of the exhaustion it causes. Exhausted leaders exhibit rushed judgment, foggy memory, stressed relationships and lack-luster decision making. None of these things contributes to effective leadership. Leaders need to play harder.

Playing hard comes in the form of big and small activities. You can take a ten minute mental trip to the Bahamas during the day. You can give yourself the gift of wellness via massage or exercise. You can meet friends out for dinner, drinks and dancing. You can take a real, two week vacation and let work survive without you. Not only can you, you should.

Today's workplace needs rested, focused, energized leaders to keep pace with the ever-changing business environment. This type of leadership partially results from managing work in a way that leaves room for rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation. Are you a workaholic? If yes, I encourage you to join me in recovery. Something amazing happens in the life of a leader when they learn to balance work with play. Open your calendar and schedule some play time today.

Adapted from The Leadership Journey, published in the Auburn Citizen newspaper