

Got Enough Stuff?

I HAVE TOO MUCH STUFF. I DON'T know about you, but no matter how many times I clean out my closets, I still have too much. This recently became apparent when I moved my home and office from Cincinnati to Kansas City. The trash bags kept filling up, but still the boxes multiplied. As I unpacked, I realized that I was suffering from the Too Much Syndrome. Too much stuff, too much information, too much of everything. It's as if the American Dream has become "the one with the most stuff wins." I see the downside of this every day in my work.

One of my clients, Rich, directs e-commerce for a Fortune 10 company. He's always attracting new opportunities for himself and his team. These opportunities always mean more work, which is great. But Rich was putting in 12-hour days. As the father of two small children, he longed to spend more time with them, but he didn't know how to balance it all. Rich simply had too much going on in his life.

The challenge I face—and I bet you do, too—is how to keep our accomplishments intact without allowing them to chain us to a life we don't want to live. I believe the real problem we face in this sped-up, I-want-it-yesterday world is in determining when enough is enough. That's the question that kept running through my mind as I unpacked box after box.

I encourage people to ponder the same question. My clients achieve huge goals, but they don't know how to celebrate—they're already focused on the next big thing. Some people acquire huge financial reserves, but they fail to enjoy their

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LINHARDT WHITE, BJ '90,

PARES LIFE DOWN TO ITS

JOYFUL CORE.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION
BY ROB HILL

money. Others devour information but are overwhelmed by how much there is still left to do.

Another client—Bob, a 50-year-old businessman worth more than \$50 million—epitomizes this. He has the cars, the houses, the real estate and the stock portfolio to show how successful he is, but Bob never feels it's enough. There's always one more task, one more goal.

That's the problem with focusing on what you lack. Whatever you've got, it's never enough. You think that fulfillment comes from ever more achievement, money and stuff. But it never happens. You keep thinking about all the things you don't have, and joy eludes you. This is not what life should be about.

When you're strapped for time—or for money—it's easy to think that more time or money will solve your problems. I know I did when I was just starting my business, working 80 hours a week while making pennies. Once I had more money, the temporal pressures were fierce because it took so much time to take care of my bigger house and better cars. And I was still exhausted at the end of the day.

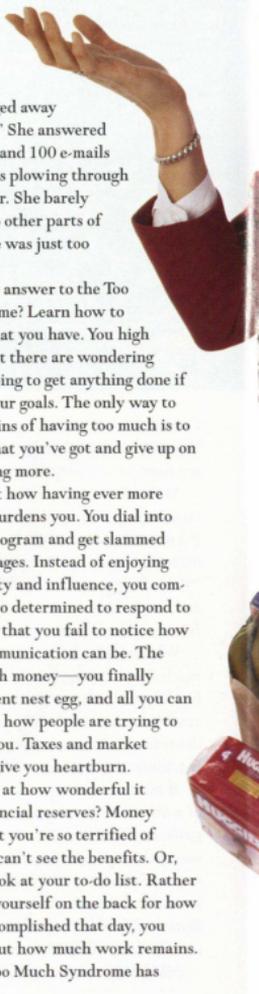
Most people I speak to are frazzled. Like my client, Jane, a public relations director at a big company. She labored from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays, con-

tinued working on the weekends, and even slogged away on "vacation." She answered 50 voicemails and 100 e-mails daily as well as plowing through stacks of paper. She barely had time to do other parts of her job. There was just too much to do.

What's the answer to the Too Much Syndrome? Learn how to take joy in what you have. You high performers out there are wondering how you're going to get anything done if you give up your goals. The only way to break the chains of having too much is to appreciate what you've got and give up on always wanting more.

Just look at how having ever more information burdens you. You dial into your e-mail program and get slammed with 50 messages. Instead of enjoying your popularity and influence, you complain. You're so determined to respond to all the e-mails that you fail to notice how powerful communication can be. The same goes with money—you finally acquire a decent nest egg, and all you can think about is how people are trying to take it from you. Taxes and market fluctuations give you heartburn. Why not look at how wonderful it is to have financial reserves? Money multiplies, but you're so terrified of losing it, you can't see the benefits. Or, take a hard look at your to-do list. Rather than patting yourself on the back for how much you accomplished that day, you stress out about how much work remains.

Yes, this Too Much Syndrome has





everything to do with focusing on the wrong things—what you don't have. That rips the joy right out of your life. It's time to accept that you can only do so much. You've done enough. Enjoy it.

This is easier said than done, so, start with a small step. Today, rather than obsessing over all that needs to get done, take a moment to write down three things you're grateful for. Then pick up the phone and let someone know how much you appreciate them. It seems silly, I know. But those baby steps toward gratitude will help you shift how you think.

That's exactly what Rich, Bob and Jane did. Bob, the successful businessman, was obsessed with cleaning off his desk every night, and when he walked in the next morning, his desk was piled high with new stuff to do. I worked with Bob on delegating. Instead of freaking out, now he strives to dole out the workload in 30 minutes or less.

I helped Rich, the e-commerce v.p., to create stringent criteria for judging which projects he takes and which he leaves.

Now he's saying yes only to projects that meet his high standards.

And then there's Jane, the public relations director and mother of three. Now she's thinking about joy more in terms of results than hours worked. She has taken two vacations and has stopped working weekends. What's more, she was promoted to vice president recently, even though she's working fewer hours.

The first step they all took toward regaining control of their lives was to

Five Fixes for the Too Much Syndrome

1. Save money. Now. Money gives you more choices on how you live and work. So, cut expenses, work part time—do anything to save.
2. Charge the most in the marketplace, and make sure you're worth it. High charges create the perception that you are the best, and everyone wants to do business with the best.
3. Work at least one day a week only on your most important activities, the things that would generate more money for you if you would just spend more time doing them. You'll get more done in less time.
4. Say "no" at least 10 times this week. If you're more concerned about what others think rather than what you want for your life, it's time to take back control and reject the things that don't support who you are.
5. Delegate everything but your brilliance. You'll make more money, feel less stress and, most important, you'll start to create more ways to improve your life.

start appreciating what they had. Or, as Bob so eloquently said, "It's time I look at what's there rather than at what's missing." It was amazing how much fun unpacking could be when I changed my focus. Too much stuff became just enough. ❁

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