

When your passion becomes your addiction

Passion is a wonderful thing. Many people long to find a business or cause they're truly excited about. But what if a passion burgeons into an addiction, like a rapacious oversized ivy plant which, untrimmed and uncontained, can crack a brick wall or uproot a tree?

Make no mistake: Business success takes a huge investment of time, energy, money, and emotion. It's no wonder your business seems to take on a life of its own. In fact, your spouse may see your business as the "third partner" in the relationship.

It's great to love what you do, but how do you know if you're addicted to your business? According to Merriam-Webster (www.m-w.com), addicted (when not referring to chemical dependency) means "to devote or surrender (oneself) to something habitually or obsessively." As a business owner, I confess I devote myself habitually, and at times obsessively, to seeing clients, keeping records, writing articles, networking, etc. To run a successful (or soon-to-be-successful) business, you pretty much have to devote yourself to it habitually or obsessively.

But what's the distinction between "healthy" and "unhealthy"? Here are some warning signs: (1) Your family complains you're "the invisible woman." (2) Friends e-mail, asking if you're still alive, but you don't have time to respond. (3) People stop inviting you to anything. (4) You can't remember when you last attended your child's baseball game or had a real conversation with anyone.

If you're open to considering you could be addicted, you probably aren't. Another good sign is willingness to examine your situation. How do you feel while working in your business? Alive? Loving? Powerful? Brilliant? It's easy to get addicted to those feelings. In a drug or alcohol addiction, you crave ever-increasing amounts to get the "high," and even the most exciting aspects of real life can't compete

with a chemically induced euphoria. Similarly, the elation we feel in our business can make real life seem mundane.

An addiction not only feels good (temporarily), but it also masks painful feelings. By focusing on the business, are you avoiding fear? Conflict? A sense of emptiness? Perhaps you've developed an addiction to achievement to try to silence the unrelenting inner critic who whispers you're "not enough." As a recovering Superwoman, I too want to believe I can leap tall buildings while entering next week's appointments into my iPhone and brainstorming something for tonight's dinner that's not only delicious but also health-conscious.

Your business, like a garden, is always changing, always growing. One plant needs pruning; another needs to be replaced with a new one, which requires extra feeding and watering. Life is like that, too. If you ignore something (read "relationship" or "self-care") for too long, it can wither away. If you feel your life is out of balance and others deserve more of you, give them what they (and you) need. Don't miss out on precious experiences and memories that once missed, are gone forever.

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