

Are you too busy being busy?

By Karen Gately | April 10, 2019

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“Giddy mate – how’s it going – you busy?” “Yeah, really busy. You?”

Boarding a plane this morning I couldn’t help but overhear these all too familiar words. Apart from the very Aussie accents involved, what caught my attention was how often I hear that conversation. Everywhere I go I hear people talking about how busy they are. My clients tell me they’re busy. Too busy in fact to do the things they know they really need to – if only they had the time.

The simple truth is we choose how we invest our time, energy and resources. While of course, the world is full of external pressures to deliver, how we choose to respond is key. For most of us, there are likely to be times when we need to dig deep and get something across the line by working long and hard. But if maintaining that pace is an everyday demand of your role or employer, then the simple reality is something needs to change.

For far too many years I bought into my own stories about how busy I was and how little choice I had in the matter. Then my Mum set me straight; as good Mums tend to do. Rolling her eyes at me while I complained of my ultra-busyness Mum said: “Karen if you weren’t busy, you’d make yourself busy”. Apparently, it was obvious to my mother that my at times out of control approach to life was of my own making.

Performing at your best and maintaining physical, mental and emotional health simply aren't possible if you're constantly doing too much. Being driven, focused and hardworking even, are unquestionably important to success. But burning yourself out and sacrificing the things that matter in your personal world never leads to a thriving life – in or out of work.

Breaking the back of 'busy' is up to you. Among the most important lessons, I have learned about creating balance include these four things:

Stop seeing busy as a badge of honour. So why do we keep telling people how busy we are? While of course, everyone is different, for many I have observed a sense of pride and self-worth in being in high demand. The reality is however that the vast majority of people are busy. Being busy isn't what matters, being effective is. I've spent many years being busy getting not a lot of important things done.

See yourself. What are you busy doing? How much time do you waste? Whether it's double handling, procrastinating or even just being stubborn, in what ways do you undermine your own productivity? How much of your own time and energy do you waste when you could just be getting on with getting the right things done?

Do what really matters. Make decisions about what you're going to do, but also what you're not. There is a myriad of things we can choose to invest in on any given day – but are they the things that will really allow you to achieve the goals you are striving for.

Ask yourself whether you are balancing the priorities you need to deliver on today, with the seeds of success you need to plant for tomorrow. Recently a CEO told me he doesn't have time to focus on the effectiveness of his Executive team because in the absence of a sales manager he needs to drive sales growth. This is a highly profitable business who are experiencing substantial growing pains. Maturing this organisations leadership capability and operating model is essential to creating a sustainable future of success, and yet this CEO is too busy to focus on that.

Get over yourself and out of your own way. Does it really need to be you delivering on a particular outcome? It's common for the people I work with to be crossing the boundaries of their own role and into that of their teams or colleagues. While you may be the most experienced or even the one with the client relationship, does it really need to be you who does the work on this occasion? If you're a perfectionist or control freak, recognise those things in yourself and learn to let some things go and allow other people on the team to do their job.

Karen Gately, a founder of HR Consultancy Ryan Gately, is leadership and people-management specialist. Karen works with leaders and HR teams to drive business results through the talent and energy of people. She is the author of The People Manager's Toolkit: A Practical guide to getting the best from people (Wiley) and The Corporate Dojo: Driving extraordinary results through spirited people. For more information visit www.ryangately.com.au



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