

Breaking Our Addiction to Busyness and Strengthening Mental Health

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Why Busyness is a Status Symbol in America

Desire social mobility – individual effort can move people up and down the status ladder



Our culture values work as a priority over leisure – it's an essential element of identity



We strive to have (and do) it all – evidenced in consumption of things and time spent



America is a knowledge-intensive economy where there's a demand for human capital



Companies want the best talent (demand)



People want to be perceived as the best talent (supply)



The 'best' talent work long hours and use busyness as a signal of their competence and ambition

Source: "Conspicuous Consumption of Time: When Busyness and Lack of Leisure Time Become a Status Symbol"

Why are we Addicted to Busyness

Dopamine Rush

Every time we check off a task, we get a little hit of dopamine, making us crave more tasks, even if they're trivial

Avoiding Emotions

Staying busy can be a way to avoid uncomfortable feelings or deeper issues we don't want to confront

Ego Boost

Being busy makes us feel needed and important, feeding our ego and sense of self-worth

Identity

For some, busyness becomes a part of their identity—if they're not busy, they don't know who they are

Social Validation

In a culture that glorifies busyness being constantly occupied can make us feel like we're "keeping up" with everyone else

Escape Mechanism

Busyness can act as a distraction from the bigger questions about life's meaning or personal fulfillment

Fear of Stillness

Slowing down can be terrifying for those who equate stillness with laziness or stagnation

Signs of a Busyness Addict

Whenever you begin to feel unpleasant feelings, you dive into staying busy

You find yourself feeling angry, frustrated, anxious or short-tempered

You no longer have time to take care of yourself or slow down

You find other people commenting on your busyness and asking if you're okay

Your schedule is completely full

You feel exhausted because of your packed schedule

Your emotional reaction to life does not mirror the events of your life

You are obsessed with ticking things off your to-do list

You are always multi-tasking - if you are watching TV, you are on the computer

You check your phone, email and social media obsessively

The background features a repeating pattern of speech bubbles in various colors (teal, light blue, yellow, pink, orange, white) on a light blue background. Each bubble contains a question mark. A solid teal horizontal bar is at the top of the page.

Busyness Quiz

Busy Type – Result – Behavior



Cost of Busyness

Decreases our intelligence and lessens awareness

Not fully 'showing up' in our own lives

Suppressed feelings can manifest into anger, frustration, resentment, isolation, etc.

Effects of Busyness

Emotional Health

- Anxiety or depression
- Increased and chronic stress and overwhelm
- Inadequacy or incompetence
- Frustration, anger, and guilt
- Loneliness or hopelessness

Physical Health

- Muscle tension or pain
- Restlessness or insomnia
- Headaches
- Reduced Self-Care
- Compromised immune function
- Fatigue
- Digestive issues

Relationships

- Deteriorating trust
- Damaging connections
- Loss of business or work opportunities
- Loss of love or friendship
- Feelings of letting others down

Work-Life Balance

- Busyness overflows from one side to the other
- 'Balance' is not there
- Resentfulness grows, impacting effectiveness at work or home
- No opportunity for rest to recharge



Busyness Doesn't Equal Success

“True success isn't about being the busiest person in the room. It's about achieving your goals with focus, intentionality, and a healthy dose of self-compassion.”

Source: [The Mental Health Cost of Busyness: Why Activity Doesn't \(linkedin.com\)](#)

Remember that self-worth does not come from being busy

- Create a mantra that expresses what self-worth truly means or reasons for self-love
- Recite it every day

Busy vs. Productive



Being busy is frantic, while being productive is focused



Being busy is fueled by perfectionism while being productive is fueled by purpose



Being busy is about working harder while being productive is about working smarter



Being busy is about being good at everything while being productive is about being great at a few important things

Strategies to Strengthen Mental Health for Busyness

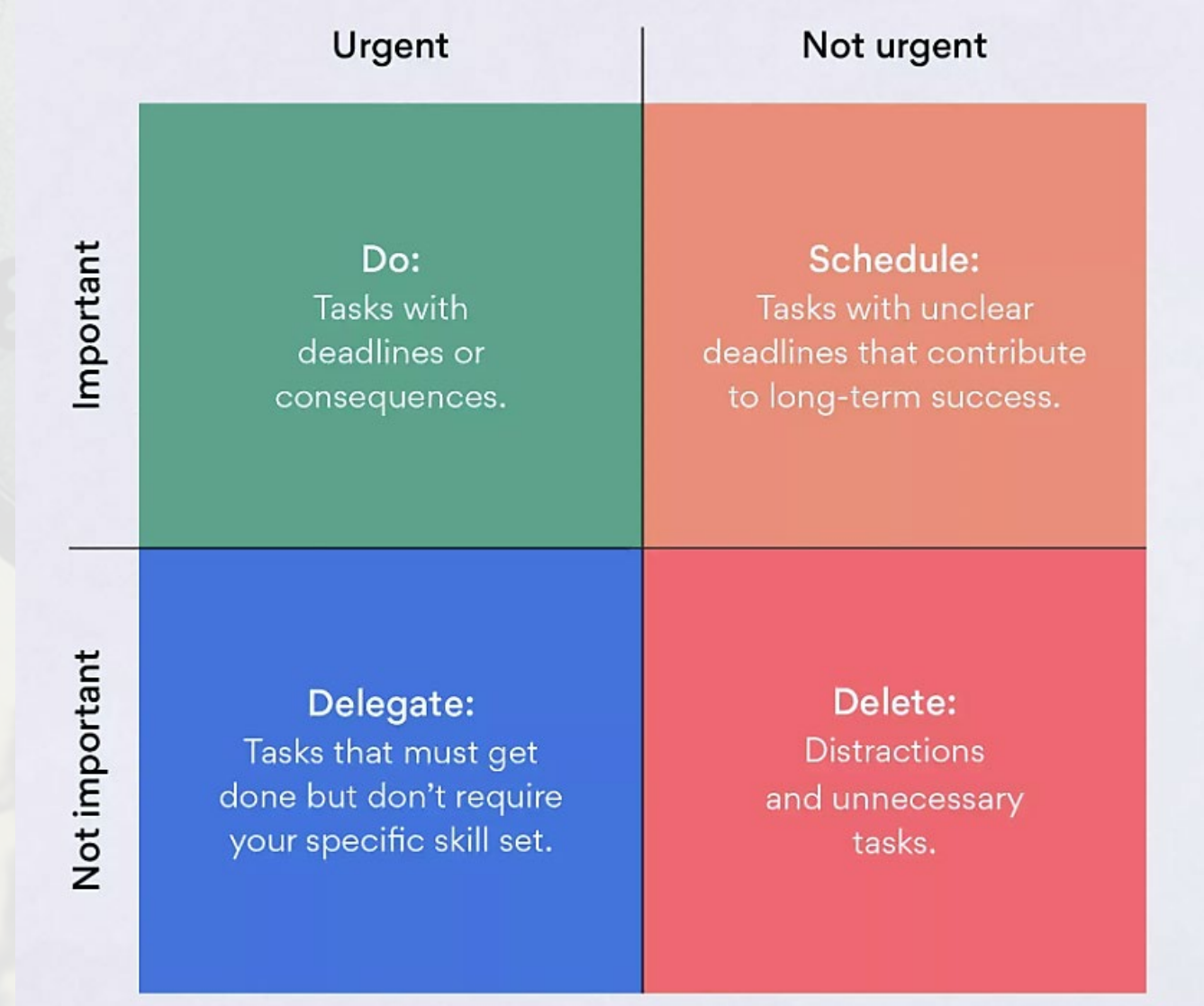
1. Write to-do lists

- **Keep it simple** - Use short, clear phrases for each task
- **Prioritize** - Rank tasks by importance or urgency
- **Break tasks down** - Divide big tasks into smaller steps
- **Set time estimates** – Track task timing to best manage time
- **Categorize** - Group tasks by context (work, home, errands)
- **Use action verbs** - Start tasks with words like “Call” or “Write”
- **Review regularly** - Adjust your list daily to stay on track
- **Choose your system** - Pick a digital or paper method for you
- **Limit tasks** - Focus on 5-7 tasks per day to avoid overwhelm
- **Include self-care** - Add breaks or personal time to stay balanced



Strategies to Strengthen Mental Health for Busyness

2. Prioritize your tasks -- Eisenhower Matrix



Source: <https://asana.com/resources/eisenhower-matrix>

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3. Quit multitasking - one task at a time to improve productivity and reduce stress

Prioritize Tasks – Tackle the most important tasks first to ensure your efforts have the most impact

Create a Dedicated Workspace - A distraction-free environment helps reduce the temptation to multi-task

Use Time Blocks - Allocating specific time periods for each task can structure your workday effectively

Turn Off Notifications - Reducing interruptions from notifications allows you to stay on task

Practice Mindfulness - Staying present can help you bring your attention back to the task at hand

Strategies to Strengthen Mental Health for Busyness

4. Set Boundaries

- **Identify Your Limits** - Reflect on what makes you stressed to understand where you need boundaries
- **Communicate Clearly and Directly** - Use straightforward language, such as, “I’m not available right now”
- **Be Consistent** - Stick to your boundaries once set to ensure they are respected
- **Learn to Say ‘No’** - Practice saying “no” without feeling guilty or needing to over-explain
- **Take Care of Yourself** - Prioritize self-care and adjust boundaries as necessary to protect your well-being

Strategies to Strengthen Mental Health for Busyness



5. Unplug

- **Disconnect from Social Media** - Designate specific times to check and stick to those limits
- **Put your Devices Out of Reach** - Place your phone in another room

6. Manage your time

- **Time Makeover** – 168 hours in each week – how do you want to spend them?
 - [30-Min-Timesheet-168-Hours-v2.pdf \(lauravanderkam.com\)](#)
 - [How-to-Do-Your-Own-Time-Makeover.pdf \(lauravanderkam.com\)](#)

Reflection & Sharing



Take a few minutes to identify one or two things to improve your business



Write it down, be specific (give yourself a deadline!)



Share with others at your table



THANK YOU!

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