

PEGGY SULLIVAN

Beyond Busyness

How to Achieve MORE
by Doing LESS

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FOREWORD

Several decades ago, I was an elite frequent flyer on three different airlines simultaneously. I was super busy! I was flying hundreds of thousands of miles a year all over the world to visit with clients and meet with my team members, who were based in six countries on two continents.

I was moving fast and making things happen! Every minute of every day was booked solid. When on the road, I measured my success based on the number of in-person client meetings I could attend to support the salespeople in the company I worked for at the time. My record—set in London—was eight. This feat meant meeting over breakfast, lunch, and dinner and required mapping out how to get all over the city—from client office to client office and from restaurant to restaurant—using the tube and black cabs without being late for anything. I was a client-meeting machine!

At the time, I didn't realize my extreme Busyness was slowly destroying my family, my health, and my career. I wasn't there for some of the most important moments in my daughter's life. My wife became super frustrated with how much of a burden I was putting on her and our young family. I was gaining weight, and my doctor began worrying about my blood pressure. And when I was over-tired, I lashed out at my coworkers.

Fortunately, I was fired from the job I thought I loved. Oh, I hated it at the time, but in hindsight I realized it was the best thing that could have happened because I was forced into rethinking my work and my lifestyle. I had the luxury of being able to reevaluate my life choices.

I made exactly the kinds of changes that you will read about in *Beyond Busyness*.

In this important book, Peggy reveals the many hidden dangers of Busyness and how to combat them to live a better life. Peggy is a wonderful storyteller, sharing examples from her own life and those of others who have made the transition to achieve more by doing less.

Peggy's super-effective Busy-Busting Process is an easy-to-implement framework for making the kind of life transition that I was forced into—but on your own terms. Rather than going through a crisis like mine, you will have the skills to choose a better life.

Now—using the ideas of *Beyond Busyness*—I have much more time for my family, my friends, and the things I love to do, like surfing and backpacking. I even have the time to take on new personal challenges like learning how to dance the Lindy Hop. I'm getting more work done in less time and making more money in the process. I wish I'd had this book decades ago!

Peggy is a true badass. You will learn a ton from her. Now is the time to take the first step to a more rewarding life and career.

DAVID MEERMAN SCOTT

business growth strategist and *Wall Street Journal*
bestselling author of thirteen books, including
The New Rules of Marketing & PR

INTRODUCTION

Hi. My name is Peggy, and I'm a recovering Busyness addict. Yes, that's right. I am addicted to *being busy*. And although I have now overcome it, most of the time, it has been a long and difficult journey to recovery.

Like many addicts, it took me years to even realize I had a problem. I used to wear my packed schedule like a badge of honor. I loved telling people how busy I was. I had lots of wake-up calls, but none of them woke me up. Here are a few of the more exciting ones:

- Destroyed my marriage
- Totaled my car
- Superglued my hands together
- Nearly died from a heart attack
- Accidentally ate cat food, mistaking it for pistachios
- Missed the grand opening event for my nonprofit organization

- Tipped a waiter \$300,000 instead of \$30
- Went to a big speaking event wearing two different shoes (thankfully, just one on each foot)

And this is just the most dramatic stuff. I was a highflier, a massive achiever, and yet I had no life. I wandered around in a burned-out haze. I wasn't healthy, happy, or focused on what's important.

My always-on lifestyle led me in every direction *but the one I truly wanted to follow*.

Busyness controlled me!

But then I finally learned how to control it.

After spending decades drowning in Busyness myself, and years more researching it in the people around me, I discovered a simple yet powerful truth:

When we do less, we become more.

I have also learned that most struggle to experience this truth. In fact, more than three out of four people I have surveyed in my annual study on this topic feel overwhelmed by Busyness and have no clear idea how to escape the cycle.

Thankfully, I have also discovered something else: a methodology to help people like you overcome Busyness and *actually live a happy and satisfying life while getting stuff done*.

Today, I'm a keynote speaker, trainer, and thought leader with the mission of sharing this methodology to help move the world past the damaging false belief that busy is the secret to success.

Let me be clear: Busy is *not* that secret. It is, in fact, absolutely the opposite.

If you're realizing that endless hustle isn't the road to fulfillment and being busy all the time *limits* what you're achieving far more than it contributes but you can't seem to figure out what to do about it—then this book is for you.

This book will help you turn your *hustle culture* into *productive and happy culture*.

It will help you *choose meaning over mayhem* in both your career and private life.

And I promise you, I am the perfect companion for this voyage because *I will not stop* until this culture shift and this choice are available to all of us.

My research-backed strategies have helped Fortune 500 companies such as Google, Bank of America, and Blue Cross Blue Shield get their people off the busy treadmill and change the way they align their time with their values.

They have also helped many small companies and individuals. I have seen the radical transformation that members of my non-profit, SheCAN!, have experienced over time while consistently using these techniques.

And now I am sharing my methodology in this book so I can help you and people like you overcome the world's culture of Busyness and find something much better.

My research has been both qualitative and quantitative. I have conducted surveys via my organization SheCAN! I have also had in-depth conversations with colleagues and acquaintances. Many of the stories I highlight throughout this book come from casual conversations with people whom I would even call friends. All the stories are real and true.

Finding such stories is not difficult. Almost everyone I meet is fighting to get to the other side of Busyness.

Going Beyond Busyness takes vision and endurance. Like any journey it demands you set out in the right direction and be committed to get to the end of it.

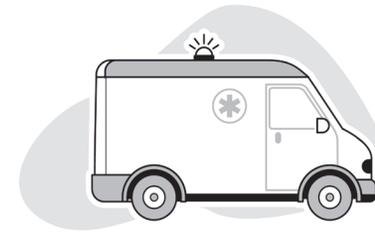
I have taken that journey, and not just once. Today, I keep taking that journey, guiding people like yourself across those wide waters, and lending a life preserver, a long stick, or my hand if necessary to keep you from drowning. I'm not special or better. I've just been across these waves before.

You, too, may have tried this journey before—going from busy as your life purpose to busy as a memory. If you didn't make it across, or fell backward, take heart—we can do this together.

If you haven't yet figured out that your Busyness is a crippling addiction, keep reading.

I am looking forward to hearing about your journey. Your life will never be the same when you make it to the other shore: Beyond Busyness.

BUSY IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD



“**C**ardiac arrest!”

As the ambulance rushed me to the hospital, the paramedic's voice on the radio swirled above me in circles. I heard these two words again and again like it was a mantra I was practicing to keep myself breathing.

How could this be happening to me? I am healthy. I eat well. I exercise. I work on things that make the world work better. I get tons done. I am a very *busy* person.

Only an hour earlier, I had been attending a typical big work meeting for my job as marketing director at Blue Cross Blue Shield. We had meetings like this all the time, and I participated with energy and enthusiasm, like a powerful leader should.

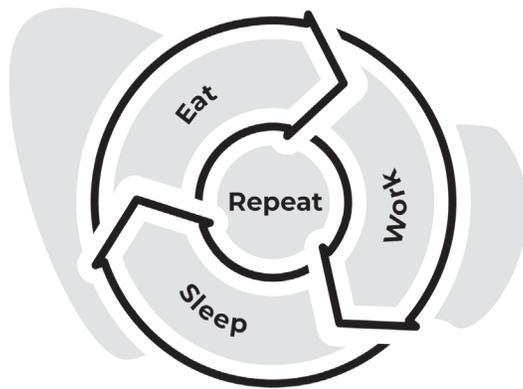
Ironically, since it is a health-care company, there were plenty of doctors and nurses in the room. And just a few minutes into the meeting, I noticed everyone was staring at me. Was the button on my blouse undone? Did I have coffee stains on my blazer or something?

No, apparently, I was turning blue. Dr. Lee, who was sitting next to me, leaned over and asked me, “Are you OK? Your pupils are dilated.”

As I started to answer, I felt a stabbing pain in my chest and could not complete my breath to speak. Then I collapsed. And the next thing I knew, I was having what felt like a heart attack.

In the hospital, I could barely sleep. I kept thinking, “A heart attack at the age of forty? How is this possible?” It turned out it was a minor stress-related heart attack. After three days, they discharged me. I was so glad to be released, not only because it meant I was OK but also because I could get back to my life. I had way too much going on to spend time in a hospital bed.

Indeed, as soon as I got home, I went right back to my basic cycle—*eat, work, sleep, repeat*. With a whole bunch of being a single mother thrown in as well.



I didn't yet realize that Busyness was not the solution to having too much to do. Busyness was actually the central problem, the key cause of all this mess.

Therefore, the solution was simple—*stop being busy*.

Easier said than done, of course. In today's world, who can stop being busy even for fifteen minutes?

My heart attack happened twenty years ago. I saw the truth then and many times since. Now I've written a whole book, which you have started reading, about how low-value and unintentional Busyness is bad and how we need to focus on what is important. But I still struggle to slow down and focus on what matters.

I have lived most of my life in an endless cycle of eat, work, sleep, repeat.

Well, in my case it has usually been more like *mother, eat, mother, work, mother, sleep, mother. Repeat*.

Because working mothers are the busiest people on the planet.

And here's the strange thing: I loved, and love, eating, sleeping, working, and mothering. I absolutely love them to bits. And yet the combination of one after another, without a break, was literally killing me.

You would think a heart attack would have delivered the message once and for all. But as you'll soon see, it didn't. In today's world, “busy” is the only four-letter word that we think means the opposite. It's the only curse word we actually think describes something desirable.

We think being busy is a great thing, so it's often the last place we look when trying to solve our life challenges. The rest of this chapter will show you that it's the first place we should be looking.

BUSY ALMOST KILLED ME (MORE THAN ONCE)

Just a few months before my heart attack, I already thought my life couldn't get worse. My best friend, Ray, my husband of twenty-two

years, father to our twelve-year-old son, Brandon, decided to celebrate Christmas Eve by telling me he needed a time-out from our marriage. It wasn't working for him anymore.

In fact, as far as he was concerned, there wasn't much of a marriage left. I was absent too much, even when I was around. I was way too busy for his liking. I was disconnected from him and what was important to our marriage. And I had been for a long time.

Eat, work, sleep, repeat.

It may seem absurd to say that his timing was terrible. What divorce is timed well? But it could not have been timed worse. Brandon was going to have his bar mitzvah in a few short months. We had planned the celebration for over a year.

Hundreds of friends and family were coming. Everyone had bought their flight tickets. We had paid for the party, the musicians, the photographers, and Brandon's first grown-up suit. Now the event would be more like the coming-out party for my failed marriage.

My friends couldn't believe it either. Ray was Prince Charming as a lover, generous as a partner, a remarkable father. What the heck was wrong with me? His Aunt Betty used these words exactly: "What did you do to destroy your perfect storybook life?"

Looking back, it seems I should have gotten the point right then. But somehow I still blamed it all on him. Betty's question about my responsibility in this offended me. I was a hardworking and extremely loving woman. He left me anyway. It couldn't be *me*. Prince Charming just became a frog all of a sudden.

Soon, he moved out, to go hang out with the other frogs in some other pond, I guess. His time-out became permanent, and he never came back.

It took a heart attack for me to start seeing the reality I had already sensed for decades: Busy is not about having a lot to do. Busy

is not actually about doing at all. It is a way of being. It is an adjective that describes identity, not actions.

Busyness was not about me living my life in a full, rich way. Busyness was keeping me from living my best life. Busy kept me distracted and blinded, so I couldn't see that my life was disintegrating in front of my eyes.

The collapse of my marriage and my heart attack were just two crises. There were so many more. All of it stemmed from a series of actions that, alone, were wonderful and fulfilling but resulted in a recurring mantra:

Eat, work, sleep, mother, repeat.

I was chasing shiny candy like a kid on Halloween. My life had become a series of meetings, emails, and work events that pretended to be social but weren't. Most of the meetings were pointless, but I was sure I had to be there, and so were my employers. These often meaningless transactions left me no time to think, be creative, or plan for the big picture.

Ray leaving me didn't slow me down. My heart attack didn't slow me down. In fact, they both sped me up. When I got tired of the endless whirlwind, I just kept on whirling. Because that's what today's woman should do.

Sleep? Not important. Exercise? When I could fit it in.

Meals? An exercise in multitasking, scoring my speed of shoving food between my lips against the measure of how many emails I could reply to.

Every minute of my life was scheduled. But I couldn't be bothered to schedule fifteen inviolable minutes for my family or myself.

I couldn't keep living like this.

Friends and colleagues said, "You need to find some work-life balance, Peggy!" And I tried, but it never worked.

Later, I learned the reason it never worked is that work-life balance is an absurd idea. First, work isn't the opposite of life; it's part of it. Second, I've never met anyone who honestly believes that this "balance" is remotely possible.

When opportunity knocks professionally, it's important to lean in before that door closes. When you have a sick child, you need to be there regardless of what you had planned. We don't balance work and not work. We have to sacrifice one for the other. We need to make hard choices sometimes. We need to say, "Hey, I worked seven evenings in a row. Let me be home for the eighth, no matter what my boss thinks."

We're all distracted by candy. But as a mother I know the dangers of strangers offering candy. Just because everyone is doing something doesn't mean it's good.

WE HAVE ALL COME UNDONE



Los Angeles has twenty streets longer than fourteen miles. The infamous Sunset Boulevard is more than twenty miles long. Sepulveda, Mulholland, and Figueroa are all even longer. I know this

because my friend Lisa walked up and down these streets for hours, looking for her car. Well, not even her car. Losing her own car would be bad enough, but this was her company's car, with weeks of work sitting in stacks on the back seat.

I would say she should have seen it coming. She did. In our weekly conversations, she told me again and again, "Life is hectic, but I'm managing, and it will get better soon."

But instead, what happened soon was that her mother became very sick and required a triple bypass. Lisa made sure she was there for her mother. Taking half a day off work to be there for the operation wasn't easy, but she managed. And the next day she was even able to make her work appointments, which were mostly near the hospital, so she could visit her mother. It all seemed to be working somehow. Until she went outside and couldn't find the car.

Months of nonstop activity had set her up to become a mindless zombie. Her mother's crisis snapped her across the edge. She had already spent hours searching for her car when she called me for advice, even though I was across the country in Buffalo. I wasn't the first person she called and probably not the last. But who could possibly help?

She finally found the car the next day, but the damage was done. Her boss was furious she had missed so many meetings and demanded she make up for it. And soon, it was Lisa who became sick. All the stress developed into a blistery rash that took months to get rid of.

What's the point of this story? Lisa thought she could manage living her life on the knife's edge, until her mother's situation threw her just a little off-balance.

Stop Focusing on the Unimportant—Spend Your Time on What Matters.

Because it isn't just Lisa. Not by a long shot. I have noticed more and more over the past few years how often friends and colleagues answer my question, "How are you doing?" with the absurd response, "I'm so busy!"

Have you noticed this when you ask the same question to the people in your life? When did "busy" become an answer to "How are you?"?

When we ask "How are you?" an automatic response such as "Fine" doesn't really answer the question with any depth. "Busy!" is far worse. It doesn't describe a "how" at all. It doesn't provide any information about well-being or state of mind. It just means you are doing a lot.

When I realized how many of my friends and colleagues were answering "busy" to the simple question of how they are, I decided to start counting the number of people who were saying this. I'm a data-driven person who feels strongly that to understand something, you first have to measure it. And I discovered that fully 94 percent of people answered "busy" when I asked them how they were doing.

This made me so concerned that I decided to run a more formal survey. I even hired a research firm to help. The surveyed people ranged across all types: young and old, single and married, male and female, working and unemployed.

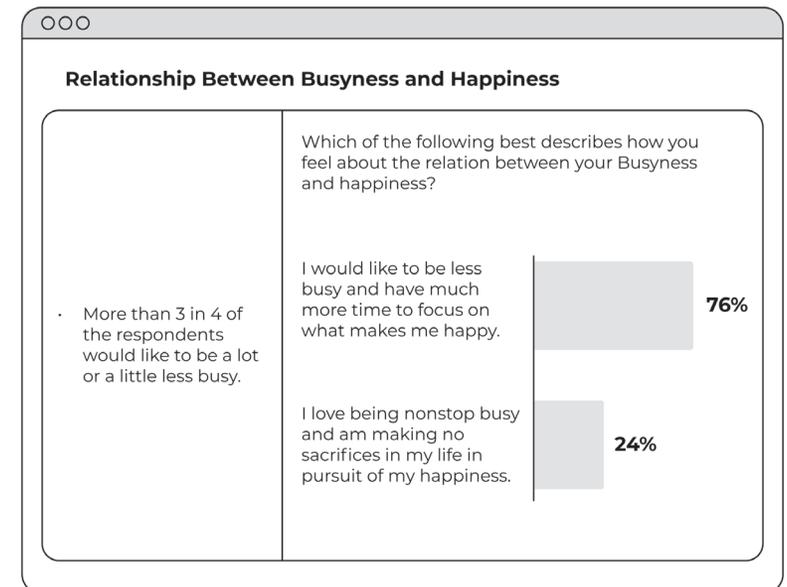
In this more formal environment, people may have been a bit less frank. Still, fully 76 percent of the respondents indicated that they were "busy" or "very busy"—and that they really would like to be less busy than they were. Men and women were pretty much

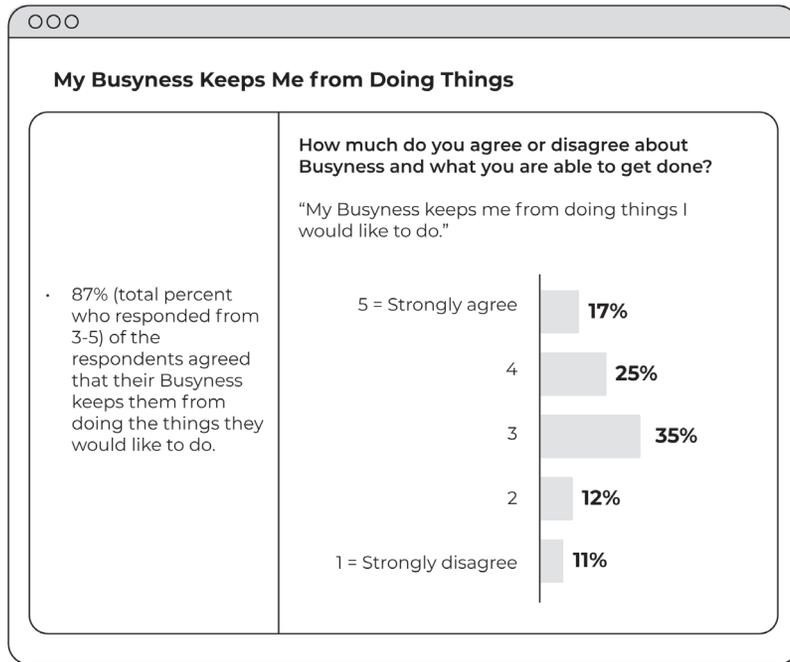
equal in this, with a difference of only 1 percent. Two-thirds of the respondents said they were "surviving, not thriving."

What this survey revealed, quite strongly, is a simple truth. As much as we all love *saying* we are busy, we don't like *feeling* busy or *behaving* busy.

A total of 74 percent in the survey said they were experiencing feelings of burnout, while 64 percent found self-care to be a challenge. More than half said they found it difficult to get even one good night's sleep because of their Busyness. Additionally, 43 percent of people said they found it difficult to focus, 60 percent said they were at least partly unhappy, and nearly 70 percent said they needed to improve their level of happiness. And yet 86 percent—a vast majority—said they believed happiness brings important benefits.

The charts that follow are a more comprehensive look at the results.





I have repeated this survey now four years in a row and made it more comprehensive each time. The results are always similar.

As a successful woman with a long corporate background, I've noticed that the number one challenge women indicate in this survey is not having time for what's important. They feel time poor. A total of 87 percent in the survey said they do not have time for what's important. Time poverty is a real thing, even though, of course, we all have the same amount of time available to us.

My friend Carolyn Gitlin agrees. As the chair of National Women's Philanthropy for the Jewish Federations of North America, she interacts with a lot of women and sees how so many are stuck in a cycle of Busyness.

She told me, "Our society glamorizes Busyness. People have this desire to consistently develop and grow, and a lot of people are competitive. So they strive and drive and turn it out and constantly keep climbing. People don't know how to turn it off. Busy is bad. It's a four-letter word. *Ughh.*"

BUSY IS BAD ON SO MANY LEVELS

I couldn't see anything as my car flipped. I could only feel myself skidding upside down and hear the sound of glass smashing.

When I woke up, there were firemen trying to get me out of the car using the jaws of life. My first thought wasn't about my health. My first thought was "I don't have time for this."

That's how busy I was.

I had been on my way to the first major event for my nonprofit, SheCAN!, which I will tell you about later in this book. This was an event I had planned for nine months, sweated over, and spent a whole lot of money on.

I looked at my watch. Seriously, I did not have time for this accident. But there I was, trapped inside bent metal. There could be no metaphor that more aptly described the Busyness trap in which I found myself.

Glancing at my watch, I realized the event was starting in fifteen minutes. I couldn't stomach not being there. I had spent the entire morning practicing my speech, and I had sorted out every tiny detail, including those I should have delegated, such as printing the name tags.

I had gotten my hair and makeup done. Now I was covered in blood, and when I tried to shout at the firemen to hurry up, noise barely came out. It was my hair's fault. My makeup's fault. They caused me to run late. It had nothing to do with *me*.

I really did blame my hair. I hadn't had a proper styling in months, so I thought it was fair to treat myself. But of course, I could only find time at the last minute. The salon ran an hour behind, and I had to rush home to dress. My brand-new dress sandals that I didn't have time to try on in the shop had a wonky backstrap that got stuck on the gas pedal. There was no time to stop the car to fix it. Besides, I could do it while driving. Why not?

Now I know why not. I was imprisoned in the bent metal for quite some time, enough to also blame my dress and my shoes. While the firemen were trying to pry me out, I was still probing with bloodstained fingers to call Mary Anne, the vice president of SheCAN!, to tell her I was on my way and not to start without me.

But they did start without me—in fact, I missed the entire event. It took them over an hour to get me out of the car, and then I discovered I was covered in blood.

HOCUS-POCUS THERE'S NO FOCUS!

Later, in my hospital bed, I realized it was Busyness, not my hair or my dress or my shoe, that caused this very costly accident. Forget about my bruises, my clothes, or my totaled car. I missed the launch of my own organization that I had dedicated months to setting up. And I missed it because of my Busyness in trying to execute it.

This all happened several years after my heart attack. I had learned nothing. Like a recalcitrant toddler who goes back to climb a high shelf she was warned away from, I couldn't let go of Busyness. When we are busy trying to catch up with our future, we miss out on the present.

There are so many bad impacts of Busyness.

- **BUSINESS DESTROYS QUALITY THINKING**

Over 90 percent of people in the survey said that being busy affected their ability to think clearly at work, their ability to prioritize, the quality of their work, and also how innovative or creative they are. A total of 50 percent of people said that it “often” affected their time for important, long-term projects, while 49 percent indicated that it often affected their time for quality thinking at work.

- **BUSINESS ENCOURAGES SMALL-PICTURE REASONING**

A total of 44 percent reported that Busyness often impairs their ability to see the bigger picture or think strategically, and 46 percent said that it often robs them of time needed to develop their team. One of the problems with being a high-achiever is that the minute we achieve something, we feel the need to justify the achievement by delivering results.

I get a promotion, and I don't take the time to celebrate it—I realize that my boss wants me to show him that he made the right call in promoting me. So we are constantly focusing on the next step instead of the big vision.

- **BUSINESS ADDS TO STRESS**

A total of 49 percent of people said that being busy “often” impacts their ability to switch off, 47 percent reported that it often elevates their stress levels, and 42 percent mentioned that it often has a harmful effect on their sleep.

In one of my first jobs, I knew a type A personality who loved to say “There’s time for sleep when I’m dead.” At the time I liked that phrase a lot. I knew what he meant: Sleep is for the weak. Efficiency is important above all else.

We strive to be as efficient as possible, even in our exercise. Our goal is to get in and out of the gym as quickly as we can, doing a routine that gives us the fastest results with the least effort. Exercise is something we check off the list. We make sure it happens. Same with decent rest. This is stressful.

- **BUSYNESS ELICITS EMOTIONAL DISTRESS**

Emotional distress due to Busyness manifests as difficulty focusing and concentrating, impatience and irritability, trouble getting adequate sleep, and mental and physical fatigue. This is a vicious cycle, of course. Emotional distress leads to trouble with sleep and fatigue, which leads to more distress.

- **BUSYNESS HURTS FRIEND AND FAMILY DYNAMICS**

Statistics indicate that 75 percent of parents are too busy to read to their children at night. Busyness affects romance and causes divorce. It results in less time for a partner and less time for self—which causes stress and burnout.

Being busy destroys our physical and mental health, alienates us from our relationships, and damages the quality of our work. We make bad decisions. We experience burnout. We forget how to focus.

A recent study by Microsoft shows that the attention span of the human race has dropped by one-fourth in the last few years. We can now only focus on average for eight and a half seconds, representing a 50 percent decrease compared with twenty years ago.*

Our memories are still slightly better than a goldfish, but our attention span is now shorter. That’s not a joke. That’s a fact.

Dr. Miriam Zylber, a mental health physician at a leading Miami hospital, says it succinctly: “We suffer from being busy, but we don’t understand the price we pay.”

BUSY DOESN’T EVEN WORK

—IT’S THE ENEMY OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

My friend Jane considered herself a master of time management. She could multitask with the best of them and get it all done. Yet she arrived very late for one of the most important appointments of her life. She really thought she would make it on time. Even if she was a few minutes late, so what? Being late caused her to miss a very important moment in her son’s life.

He ran sixty-three yards on one of the first plays of his first football game and scored his first touchdown. When he was celebrating in the end zone, looking around, she wasn’t there. “Hey, no problem,” he told her. But he was just being a typical teenager. Of course, it was a problem.

Jane felt terrible. But there was no way she could ever make up for it. She watched it again and again on the video replay. But that

* “How Long Can the Brain Focus? The Science of Focus,” Brainelevate, last updated October 4, 2022, <https://brainelevate.com/how-long-can-the-brain-focus/>.

didn't help. She could feel better all she wanted. But it was her son who was hurt.

Being busy doesn't just damage ourselves. It also creates stress for everyone around us, both at work and in our personal lives. We leave people we care about feeling ignored or neglected. We grow distant without even noticing it.

In our survey, nearly eight of ten women said that "family" is the source of their happiness. And yet they have almost no time available for family—roughly the same number of respondents said that family commitments are part of what makes them too busy. Checking boxes does not mean we're happy. Filled in is not fulfilled.

The typical response to having a lot to do is to use time management techniques: calendar reminders, notifications, time blocking. The problem is, managing time doesn't make more of it. Every time we cross something off that to-do list (*Kaching!*), we add three more. Often, crossing a task off *requires* adding further tasks first.

Perhaps the most common technique of time management is multitasking. A total of 62 percent in our survey said multitasking was their key strategy to overcome their Busyness. It was by far the most popular answer.

Yet study after study shows that multitasking doesn't work. In fact, it radically undermines our efficiency. Multitasking literally splits the brain in two, forcing the left and right hemispheres to work independently, reducing productivity by as much as 40 percent. A study from Watson and Strayer* shows that only 2.5 percent

* Jason M. Watson and David L. Strayer, "Supertaskers: Profiles in Extraordinary Multitasking Ability," *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 17, no. 4 (2010): 479–85, <https://doi.org/10.3758/PBR.17.4.479>.

of people—one out of forty of us—are able to multitask effectively. For the rest of us, multitasking makes us take almost three times as long to get the job done, with three times as many errors.*

Multitasking leads to lower GPAs for college students† and IQ score declines of up to 15 points, lowering an adult's intelligence to the level of an eight-year-old.‡

Even in the rare moments that multitasking does work, the stretch it takes to get there leaves you *feeling* as though you weren't productive, which takes a toll on your mental health. The more often people in one study were interrupted by emails and task switching, the more likely they were to say they didn't feel productive, no matter what the results were.§

Just having access to our emails increases our stress levels noticeably even if we don't check them.¶ In other words, knowing

* Sylvain Charron and Etienne Koechlin, "Divided Representation of Concurrent Goals in the Human Frontal Lobes," *Science* 328, no. 5976 (2010): 360–3, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1183614>.

† Saraswathi Bellur, Kristine L. Nowak, and Kyle S. Hull, "Make It Our Time: In Class Multitaskers Have Lower Academic Performance," *Computers in Human Behavior* 53 (2015): 63–70, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.06.027>.

‡ Christian P. Janssen, Sandy J.J. Gould, Simon Y.W. Li, Duncan P. Brumby, and Anna L. Cox, "Integrating Knowledge of Multitasking and Interruptions across Different Perspectives and Research Methods," *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 79 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2015.03.002>.

§ Gloria Mark, Shamsi Iqbal, Mary Czerwinski, and Paul Johns, "Focused, Aroused, but so Distractible: A Temporal Perspective on Multitasking and Communications (2015)," https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/p903-mark.pdf?utm_source=zapier.com&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=zapier.

¶ Kostadin Kushlev and Elizabeth W. Dunn, "Checking Email Less Frequently Reduces Stress," *Computers in Human Behavior* 43 (2015): 220–28, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.005>.

there is more to do that is not related to what you are currently doing is very distracting for humans.

So why is time management still so popular? Well, it's a multibillion-dollar industry, for one thing. And I guess it works for a few people. But it doesn't work for the people in our survey. Time management does not leave time for self-care, family, friends—the things that really matter. Being busy might mean doing more, but it doesn't mean getting more done.

“BUSY” IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD—FOR REAL

When I was a little girl, words like f*** and s*** were not allowed in our house. If we said them, our dad would literally wash out our mouth with soap. Then he would give us a big glass of water so we could blow bubbles to make it seem a bit more fun and less drastic.

This might seem like child abuse in today's context. And some may argue that punishment is not the best way to teach positive values. But the lesson I am pointing at here is that the words we use matter. And whatever method we use to do it, the same way we want to teach our children not to utter all the other curse words, we need to teach them, and ourselves, to banish “Busy” from our vocabulary.

We use “Busy” to make ourselves feel better because somehow, we've all come to hear this word as a badge of honor, a status symbol.

- *Oh, you're busy? You must be successful and important.*

- *If a doctor has a six-month waiting list, they must be worth waiting for.*
- *If an employee works overtime and all weekend, they must be a rock star.*

“How are you?”

“Busy!”

Wash Your Mouth Out!

“Busy” is a metaphor for achievement tinged by a curse. Unlike “Fine,” it actually means something. But not something good. It suggests self-satisfaction from drowning in overwhelm. Elation from being flooded in misery. Pride shown off by apology. It's a humble-brag, show-off, and plea for help all rolled into one. We're on the edge of burnout, but don't worry, we'll never collapse. We're in action, we're dealing with it, and soon, very soon, it will all calm down.

“I'm doing great. And terrible. I have no time.”

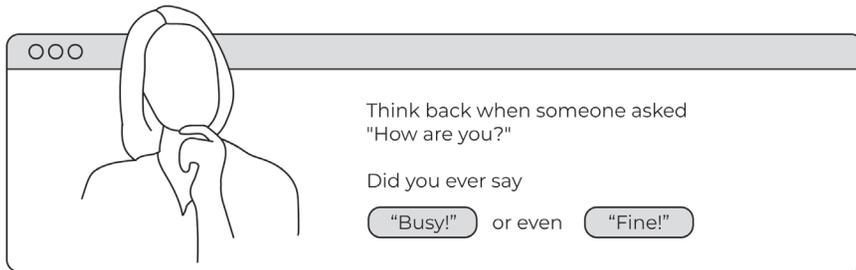
Describing your panic as “busy” doesn't make it better. In fact, the closest accurate meaning for “busy” is another four-letter word: “Help!”

We need to start hearing the word “busy” for what it actually is: a swear word. A profanity. Every time we catch ourselves saying the word “busy,” we need to wash our mouth out with metaphorical soap.

Next time someone asks how you are, find a different way to describe yourself. You may struggle to find good words to replace “busy.” That's all right. It's easier said than done. For me, it soon became clear that Busyness was more than a bad habit. It was an addiction.

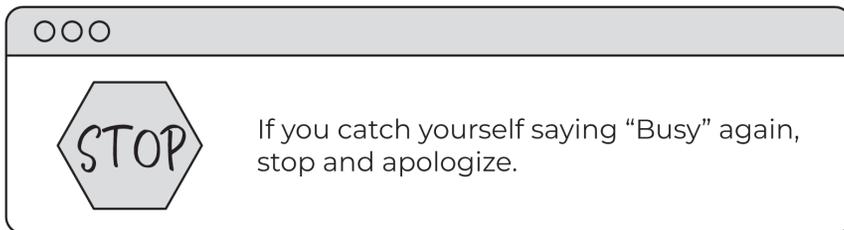
BUSY-BUSTING TOOL #1

Wash Your Mouth Out



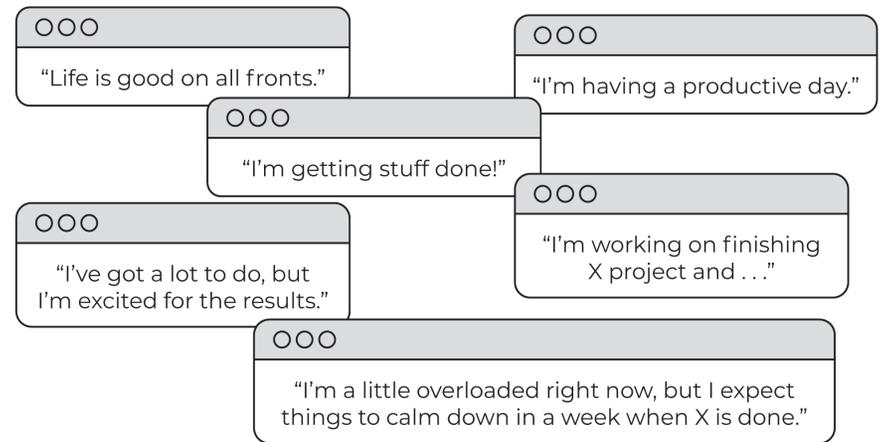
Take a few minutes to make a list of other more genuine and generous responses you could have given.

In the next few days, use these or similar ways of answering the "How are you?" question. Actually, stop for a moment, connect with the person, and say something meaningful.



Begin to train yourself to manage this conversation differently.

Whenever you even think of the word "Busy," start to taste the remnants of Ivory soap in your mouth and say something else. Anything else!



It's hard to find a professional who doesn't feel stressed, busy, tired, or overworked. Dropping these responses from your vocabulary, except when they're truly needed, will make you feel calmer and appear more capable to others and to yourself.

