

Time + Technology = Trouble

BY EILEEN L. BERMAN



Bill, a 50-year-old man

with a wife and two small children, had been working on a project at work for the past year. He was so caught up in his work that he went to the office seven days a week from early morning until late at night. He would come home exhausted, not have time for anyone and then repeat the process at dawn of the next day. When Bill was home, he was either on the telephone or sitting at his computer getting his e-mail or sending messages. His project involved different parts of the world so that the time differentials meant that he needed to communicate with people just about 24 hours a day.

While this may seem rather bizarre, it is, in fact, to some extent how many people lead their lives today. Many are falling victim to this lopsided type of lifestyle as they are afraid to say anything for fear of losing their jobs. Marie, his wife, had no such fear. She was fed up with being a “single parent” and finally issued an ultimatum: “Either change your lifestyle or I shall get a divorce.” Bill agreed to see a psychologist in order to try to save his marriage.

When I met with him, the story he told was disheartening. He was thoroughly consumed by his job, subsisted on coffee and junk food, didn’t exercise and was putting on weight. He hardly saw his family or spoke with his wife. His “project” showed no signs of ending soon as he was working alone and could not keep up with deadlines. Did he have any financial demands that were driving his work-

holism? Not at all; they were not in debt as his wife kept control of their spending. His job, however, was very demanding and he had to keep these hours in order to keep up. For Bill, there was no other way. It was his wife that had to accept things as they were.

As I listened to him, I realized I had heard stories like this many times. I questioned how he expected his marriage to last when it was questionable whether *he* could last. He was out of shape, leading a toxic existence and was missing seeing his children grow up and having a relationship of substance with his wife.

He was victimized by two things that loom large in our society today: time and technology. People never seem to have enough time to do the vast number of things they set out for themselves. What with cell phones, BlackBerries and computers, they never leave their office environment behind.

When I asked Bill what his mission in life was, he stared at me blankly. What mission? He had to get this project done and that’s all he was interested in right now. He lived in the present and never envisioned the future. The future, in Bill’s mind, had to do with the completion of this project, no matter how long it took. Everything else was on hold. He had no guidelines for living — either inside or outside of his job.

How do people get to this point? If we look around us, we see people rushing hither and yon, always trying to “make up time” as if time was their friend. In fact,

most people don’t treat time as a friend because they don’t sit still long enough to enjoy it.

While technology is a wonderful thing, it has really spread its tentacles around us. We are being suffocated in its grasp. Unless we learn how to control technology and not the other way around, we shall lead very unfulfilling lives.

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As I treat individuals and couples with stress-related disorders, I wonder how we got to this point. When I mention their need to change their lifestyle, they look at me in wonderment. How can they possibly change when they have so many demands on them? And, given their needs, there is not enough time in the day as it is! Perhaps Bill must look at his needs and priorities and begin to see how his misconception of life has brought him to this crisis point. But let’s face it: Bill can’t do this until he forms a different relationship with time.

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