

PSYCHIATRY

Do You Hate Your Job?

To the Neurotic, Work Is Either a Poison To Avoid Or a Drug To Which He Is Addicted, But Never a Joy

By MARJORIE VAN DE WATER

YOU know the man who hates his job. And the woman who is passionately devoted to hers. Well, they are both probably neurotic.

To most of us, work is a necessity. Without it, we don't eat. And without it, we can never make a place for ourselves—become respected, influential, honored.

Despite its necessity, work need not be drudgery. There is, for the individual in congenial employment, a real pleasure in the exercise of his talents—a sheer joy in activity not unlike the delight that children have in play.

But a normal person can take it or leave it. He arrives in the morning with some degree of enthusiasm. He leaves at the end of the day, willing to give it up for other interests in home, club, church or place of recreation.

Not so the neurotic. To him, work is either a poison to be hated or a drug to which he is addicted. In either case he is enslaved. He works, not for the satisfaction of accomplishment or pay, but because he is relentlessly driven by some mysterious inner force he can neither understand or control.

Neurotic attitudes toward work have been made the subject of scientific study by Dr. Bernard S. Robbins, of the Vanderbilt Clinic.

Not Efficient

The neurotic in the office is not the most efficient worker. His desk (or hers for the neurotic is most frequently a woman) is piled high with tasks undone. Many of them may be self-invented jobs undertaken without enthusiasm but with the feeling that no one else can do them so well.

The work addict is still toiling at her desk when others have gone whistling home. Holidays and Sundays see her in the same spot, bending with nervous intensity over work never completed, never entirely laid aside.

If the work addict is faced with a Sunday at home or a vacation, she will be unhappy. Restlessly she will pace the floor and worry about the things left undone at the office.

Physicians recognize a disease entity which is called the "Sunday neurosis." Anxiety fills the one day of rest for sufferers from this ill. They are under tension all day long and are profoundly dissatisfied whenever they are faced with a period of leisure.

Now extreme enthusiasm for a job need not necessarily point to the neurotic. Many an ambitious youngster has forged ahead by just such wholehearted zeal for his work.

The difference is that the normal work enthusiast is motivated by a definite purpose. He is working for a practical goal.

The work addict is merely trying to drown himself in it. By keeping himself eternally busy, he manages to prevent his anxieties from coming up in his conscious mind to overwhelm him.

Death Kiss

"The person and his work," said Dr. Robbins in his report to the scientific journal *Psychiatry*, "are bound together not in friendly and joyous union, but in a kind of death kiss."

Not all neurotics are work addicts. Just as much a sign of mental ill health is the extreme resentment with which others view their jobs—work to them is a phobia.

"Work is something foreign and alien to the neurotic," explained Dr. Robbins, "a task externally imposed, a duty to which they must submit and about which they have no choice. They can do nothing but comply."

The work phobic has no genuine interest in his job. He has no incentive, no love for what he is doing, or, in Dr. Robbins' words, "no feeling of this is what I want to do."

All work done by the work phobic is done under pressure either from without or from within in answer to the fear of dismissal or disgrace. It is bitterly resented and eagerly resisted.

In the work phobic, all spontaneity and initiative have been crushed.

"The play attitude," said Dr. Robbins, "has disappeared. Work becomes then not a part of the self, willingly embraced and freely expressed, but an enemy. An enemy so powerful that it can

be fought only by reproachful and defiant silence, inertia."

Every business executive is familiar with the problem presented by this deadening, depressing, baffling inertia.

The work phobic may never openly rebel. He may never refuse a task or flout an order. He conforms with outward submissiveness. Yet, mysteriously, the work doesn't get done.

Perhaps sickness intervenes. It is an easy matter for the work phobic to worry himself into a real illness in the face of a difficult job to be done. Headaches and colds not only provide relief from the necessity of facing the task, but may even bring sympathy and flowers instead of a possible reprimand for slipshod work.

Compensation Neurosis

The "compensation neurosis" familiar to those administering workmen's compensation plans is a disease that afflicts the work phobic. A physician who specializes in diseases of the skin recently told me that he has a number of very persistent cases of skin trouble that seem caused by the "compensation neurosis." Skin diseases are aggravated and in some cases perhaps caused by nervous conditions.

The fears and worries of the work phobic in connection with his job may bring on such a disease. He is awarded compensation or illness insurance. And, although he is not consciously malingering, nevertheless just so long as the compensation keeps up, the skin trouble never disappears.

Accidents happen to the work phobic. These cannot be called deliberate sabotage. They seem genuine enough.

Acting as camouflage for the inertia of the work phobic are often the most extravagant sorts of exalted ambitions.

Now dreams of heroic achievement are not abnormal, in themselves. Scientific achievement is based on the efforts of those who have cheerfully attempted the impossible.

In a child or developing young person, daydreams of fantastic wealth, power and accomplishment are normal and healthy expressions of the growing personality. In such expansive dreams, the personality puts forth new shoots and determines the direction of natural development.

But in an adult, such unrealistic dreaming is usually a retreat from reality rather than a feeling out toward it. It is a way of saying to oneself, "Never mind if I can't do this stupid job, I am going to do much greater things later on."

"A child or an adolescent may have, to us, a seemingly very expansive ambition," Dr. Robbins explained, "without being motivated by anxiety. An adult cannot."

"To a child, it may well serve a healthy function of expanding assertiveness . . . To an adult it increases his anxiety, furthers his inter-personal remoteness and enhances his destructiveness both to himself and others."

Distinguished from Ambition

It is difficult, sometimes, to distinguish between laudable ambition and the grandiose aims of the neurotic.

An example of the distinction is given by Dr. Robbins. When a young woman with a flair for imaginative writing dreams of becoming another Keats or Byron, it is a legitimate ambition. But if she has reached the age of 55 and has never done any writing and still dreams of being another Shakespeare, that is an extravagant idea.

The neurotic seldom does anything about his grand ideas. When the time comes for action, a new plan is developed and the old one abandoned.

"A typical feature of the extravagant aspiration is the implicit compulsion in the neurotic to be not only good or among the best in a chosen field, but to be supreme, unique, occupying a singularly untouchable position," Dr. Robbins pointed out.

"The goal is exclusive possession of the pinnacle, above reproach or criticism, the subject of universal admiration.

Must Be First

"The need for originality is an obsession—an originality difficult to obtain for many reasons, but especially because it hopes to deny the work of all others. An idea dare not be built upon the accumulative knowledge of centuries, but must be entirely novel, resting on no base but its own.

"Each bit of achievement must be revolutionary and contain within it no reference to the past, or gap to be filled in by the future. It must come into being as perfect—and furthermore without the expenditure of too great an effort."

"The neurotic wastes much of himself and his life, nevertheless the secret hope

is that each ambition will be fulfilled immediately.

"The disturbed aim has an indescribable urgency about it that recognizes no limitations and brooks no obstructions. The writer must complete his play over night, produce it on the second, be acclaimed as the outstanding playwright of the age on the third."

It is a mistake to take too lightly the absurd ideas of neurotics. Such persons are ill just as are patients with pneumonia or heart disease. They are pathetically dependent upon their fantastic notions to bolster weakened personalities and cloak the worries they dare not face.

Dr. Robbins tells of a young woman who built up a fiction of illness and injury to hide from herself the fact that she had become mentally incapable of the work required of her in her office. When the edifice of her fabrications was toppled over and she had to face the fact of her mental disability she rushed in front of a truck and was immediately killed.

Exalted ambitions, combined with the powerful inertia of the work phobic, more commonly lead to such substitutes for labor as cheating, stealing, bluffing and sponging.

Check-Casher

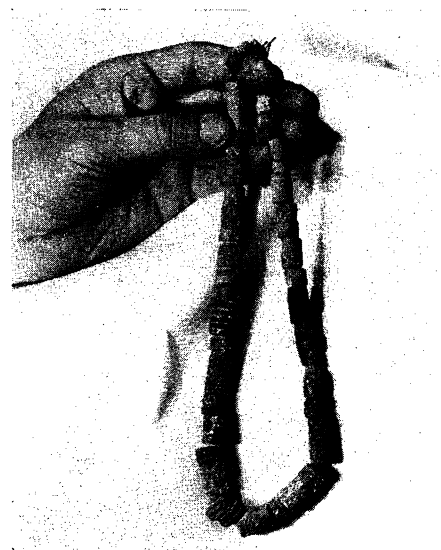
The work phobic is often a ready check-casher and until-payday-borrower. When checks are returned for "insufficient funds," a good bluff backed by more fortune-making plans serves as security for another loan to cover the defaulting.

"That such substitutive activities are profoundly destructive to others is all too obvious," Dr. Robbins comments. "That they do something to the self other than arouse misgivings of integrity is equally true but not so obvious.

"Whereas, genuine resources and fertility demonstrated by actual productivity may have originally been present, where these secondary trends become prominent, even if quite unconscious, sterility results. The bluff becomes little more than an empty shell, although he may have had at first a great deal upon which to base his assumptions.

"The cheat or plagiarist is caught up in a dizzy whirl necessitating increased dishonesties in order to maintain a position becoming increasingly precarious.

"The sponger finally loses all need to develop independence. Energies are directed towards keeping up the pretense and the very insecurity and flimsiness of the whole structure gives the facades their value, gives the pretenses their



GENUINE ANTIQUE

Beads a third of a billion years old make up this necklace, pictured by George A. Smith, supervising principal of the Quarryville, Pa., schools. They are joints of sea lily (crinoid) stems, left as fossils in the limestone strata laid down by the Devonian sea that covered much of Pennsylvania. Picked up and strung just as they weathered out, they make nice beads.

preciousness instead of the more genuine attitudes.

"There is no sincere effort then to develop the self or the self's interest which makes for positive productivity and creativeness, but only interest in maintaining the front.

"What actual potentiality may have been present originally is dried up. The person may become much like a polished apple with a rotten core. The appearance is the most valued asset, and great anxiety occurs whenever a threat to the facade or a 'seeing through' is imminent."

This article was edited from manuscript prepared by Science Service for use in illustrated newspaper magazines. Copyright, 1939, by Every Week Magazine and Science Service.

Science News Letter, December 9, 1939

LANGUAGES

LINGUAPHONE

Thousands of men and women, in spare moments at home, have found the quick, easy way to master a foreign language—by the world-famous LINGUAPHONE METHOD. Amazingly simple and thorough. Do you wish to speak French, Spanish, German, Italian or any of 27 languages?

SEND FOR FREE BOOK

LINGUAPHONE INSTITUTE
31 R.C.A. Building New York