

# The Busy Signal

Originally published by Neil Brady

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A long-time client calls one day and starts the conversation off with the usual formalities.

"I haven't spoken with you for a long time! How have you been?" she asks, politely.

"Busy," you respond. "Things are pretty hectic. Crazy busy."

Without even realizing it, you have dropped a four-letter word with some stinging implications: busy.

It can be easy to see how "busy" is our go-to response, considering the pace of modern North American life. Many of us have packed schedules from morning till night – an hour with the personal trainer, a business dinner, shuttling Sally to ballet class. It seems our calendars are fuller, and busier, than ever.

So when you respond that you're run off your feet, you may innocently think you are speaking the truth. You are busy, right? You probably are, but the message being sent to the person is not what you intend. Essentially you are shouting, "I have other things going on and I don't have time for you!"

When it really comes down to it, you do have time for them, especially if it means making a sale, signing a lucrative contract, or fostering a new relationship. These are all things that benefit us professionally and make our businesses succeed.

Janet Choi, of iDoneThis, points out that the stereotypical "I'm busy" response does little to stimulate conversation, and makes those who do spend time with "busy" people feel ripped off. In her experience, those who are truly occupied don't often spit out the "I've been busy" line.

Those who do use it, says Choi, are usually trying to communicate that they are important, or are giving an easy excuse to get out of an engagement. Psychologically, she says those who like to be "busy" may be afraid they're not important or valued, and fill their time with meaningless tasks. Others overbook themselves until they feel guilty for not getting everything done, or for doing tasks that don't mesh with their productivity model.

"The worship of busyness as such a virtue is where the trouble begins, providing the foundation to its indiscriminate use as a front or an excuse," says Choi. "It's easy, even enticing, to neglect the importance of filling our time with meaning, thinking instead that we'll be content with merely filling our time. We self-impose these measures of self-worth by looking at quantity instead of quality of activity."

## Breaking the 'busy' cycle

Freelance writer Jessica Latham burned herself out early in her professional career. A neck injury forced her to slow down, and while recuperating she had time to reflect on the way she had been living her life. She discovered three questions you can ask yourself to help break the busy cycle.

**First, ask:** What am I doing in the day that does not serve me? Do I need to spend three hours every weekend cleaning the house or can my family divide, conquer, and clean in only one hour?

Do I need to spend two hours each day updating my social media status or can I update my profile once a week? What am I willing to sacrifice for internal sanity and calm?

**Second, ask:** Why do I do all that I do? You might be shocked to see that you cling to a number of superfluous tasks for money, pride, power, or recognition.

**Third, ask:** What would happen if I stopped doing this? Clearly, if you abruptly quit your job you might face immense challenges. Maybe start by identifying something small to erase from your over-packed day.

Instead of gauging your productivity on how many slots are filled on your daily calendar, ask yourself if you are getting the most important tasks completed in an effective manner. Identify key activities, and set aside adequate time to devote to them. Ditch tasks that aren't essential and switch your focus to those that will reap the greatest reward.

Remember to treat your time as an asset, strive to delegate tasks you don't need to undertake yourself, and most of all, take time to focus on your goals. You're never too busy to succeed.

Remember also that the next time you tell a person that you're busy, you just may be telling someone that was about to refer a big opportunity to you that you're too busy to consider it. That's probably not your intention, even if you really are busy, but that is the message received. It's kind of like

a busy signal on the phone. You cease the connection when you get that signal and so does the person that received the busy message from you.

*Schooley Mitchell is the largest telecom consulting company in North America. They publish "The Pulse", which delivers high-level business information. For more information, contact Neil Brady at 1-855-572-SMTC or visit [www.schooleymitchell.com/sb](http://www.schooleymitchell.com/sb)*

