



Why refining your working habits is key to achieving happiness

Breaking bad work habits is a skill says *Yu Dan Shi*. Learning the tools to interrupt negative routines will help you get healthier, and stay successful for longer.



THE EXPERT

Sydney-based Yu Dan Shi is a sought-after coach, mentor and speaker. After hitting rock bottom in 2008 while working as an executive for a Fortune 100 company, she was compelled to search for more meaningful ways to work and live. Today, Yu Dan helps other professionals and executives live an inspired life. She is also the author of the new book, *Come Alive – Live a Life with More Meaning and Joy*.

Research from Australian National University shows that working longer than 39 hours a week puts your health at risk if you also spend more than 28 hours a week in caring or domestic work.

These people will more likely experience mental illness and symptoms of distress such as feeling nervous, anxious or down. Given many EAs work more than 40 hours a week, what this tells us is working more is not the answer; we need to work smarter.

Healthy working habits are skills to be learned

Work-life balance is not a new topic. However, what we seldom explore is the fact it's not easy for people to achieve work-life balance—unless they have been taught how. We are creatures of habit. We can't change the way we work or live overnight. It's a skill.

The reality is the majority of the workforce has never been taught how to work in a healthier way or how to perform at an optimal level. Most of us have only ever been taught how to work harder.

I was so burnt out in 2008 that it took an emergency operation to force me to look at things differently. My doctor explicitly told me that my life-threatening illness was the result of stress. To the outside world, I was a positive, strong, resilient

mother and leader, but I suffered internally and lacked the tools to manage the situation.

Understanding human performance

There is a limit to how much and how hard we can work. Like a fuel tank, our energy needs to be topped up. When people work long hours, there is not enough time for rest and renewal. In reality, the faster we know how to recover and renew, the faster and more consistently we reach optimal performance. Elite sports people have mastered this approach.

Over the past 10 years, sleep has become the secret weapon of more and more Olympic competitors.

Once we understand slowing down creates better performance, I have found people are much more willing to improve how they work and live. Here are some of my favourite daily habits. I have found them simple yet they make a huge difference to our energy, well-being, and happiness.

Four daily habits that would make you happier

- **Learn to rest.** Have you ever felt that two hours of good work is better than 20 hours of poor work? It's likely that you were rested to do the work. If you feel less motivated to do something, it might be an indication that your energy is running low. Instead of blaming yourself for lacking perseverance, take a break.

- **Be in nature.** Research shows that being in nature refreshes us and increases our cognitive performance. It can be as simple as including a daily walk in your routine. I have often suggested my clients have meetings outside their office, whether in an open café or turn a sitting meeting into a walking meeting.

- **Stop reacting.** Many people jump into the reacting mode from the moment they get up. If most of our hours are spent reacting, we are likely to feel exhausted and out of control. I have often suggested my clients begin their day with the things they want to achieve first, instead of simply reacting.

- **Do something fun.** Research has shown that having fun reduces stress, keeps us energetic, and increases more job satisfaction. When I play with my dog Silly at the park, I always walk home feeling much more energetic and happier. On the surface, some activities seem non-productive, when in fact, they provide vital recovery time.

We all want to succeed, but we don't have to sacrifice our well-being in the process. Once people learn to work and live in a more optimal way they sustain success for much longer. ☘

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