

OVERcommitment

■ by Charlene Brouwer, MA, LAMFT



Some people seem to thrive on it; others run from it. Some find it strangely comforting; others have experienced painful consequences because of it.

How about you? What is your experience with overcommitment?

It can be a healthy practice to routinely evaluate our obligations. Are you stretched beyond your ability to fulfill your commitments in a healthy manner? Are you saying yes to your highest values, or to whatever comes along? Living in a world of abundant opportunities, expectations, and challenges, it is no wonder that many of us find ourselves struggling with overcommitment.

Granted, sometimes life can be exceptionally busy due to circumstances outside of our control. We may experience seasons where our schedules are over-full. Then, when certain events or deadlines have passed, we return to a healthier pace of life. However, there can also be situations where we are chronically overcommitted. It becomes our mode of operation, a way of life.

Why do we overcommit, stretch ourselves too thin, and add stress to our already stress-filled lives? Following are some possible reasons; which ones ring true for you?

- To feel significant and valuable: I only feel worthwhile when I receive attention and praise for all that I do. I believe that the busier I am, the more important I am.
- To suppress uncomfortable or painful feelings: If I keep myself really busy, then I don't have time or space to feel my sadness, loneliness or other painful emotions.
- To avoid or put off important work and relationships: If I'm overextended with work and volunteer commitments, then I won't have to deal with the conflict in my marriage, my relationships with my teenagers, etc.
- To receive approval from others: If I say yes to the requests of others, then they will like me and think highly of me. If I say no, they won't accept me.
- Because we lack a clear sense of purpose and priorities. As author Patricia Sprinkle states, "If you don't decide how to spend your life, other people will decide for you."

What are some possible solutions to the challenge of overcommitment?

- Make decisions prayerfully. Psalm 90:12 is a great prayer for discernment: "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." It has been said that we may need to say no to the good in order to say yes to the best for our lives.
- Give yourself grace. Become a kind and gentle observer of yourself and learn from seasons of overcommitment. Discover your unique sweet spot. What is too little, what is too much, and what is just right - for you?
- Don't judge others. We are all uniquely created by God. What feels like overcommitment to you may be just right for others. What seems like under-commitment to you may feel overwhelming to someone else.

We do this all imperfectly, and that's okay. Be honest about your own challenges in choosing how to spend your time. As you pursue your unique level of commitment in life, remember the words of Anne Wilson Schaefer, "Every human being has limits, and I am a human being."

Additional Resources:

Meditations for Women Who Do Too Much - by Anne Wilson Schaefer

Women Who Do Too Much: How to Stop Doing it All and Start Enjoying your Life - by Patricia Sprinkle

Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives - by Richard A. Swenson, MD

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Charlene Brouwer is a Licensed Associate Marriage & Family Therapist. She enjoys working with individuals, couples and families in our Evergreen Park & Orland Park locations.

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www.chicagochristiancounseling.org

800.361.6880 | info@chicagochristiancounseling.org

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