EXECUTIVE VITALITY™: ARE YOU WORKING TOO HARD?

As an executive coach who works with high-powered, hard-working, goal-oriented senior leaders, I very often suggest that they reserve white space on their calendars. One reason is to improve results; the other is to preserve/improve physical and mental health.

Along that theme, I recently saw an article in MSN Money - The Big Lie about Hard Work - which made me think again about this subject. The author, Geoffrey James, puts it well: “Success emerges not from hard work per se but from figuring out the best time to act and then acting, not from activity for its own sake.” And of course, the counterpart is figuring out when to stop and then stopping!

We have probably all had the experience (or maybe many of them) when we have burned the midnight oil, hopefully not sent out whatever we were working on, read it in the light of day, and said, “WHAT! How did I ever think that made sense?” Then of course, you have to start over again. This is the part in the article about the tendency, if you are working too hard, to “create extra work for [yourself] and everyone else.”

Pushing to work long hours without taking restorative breaks can be bad for your mental health, cardiovascular health, sleep, brain, musculoskeletal system, weight, eyes... and more. Here are two articles on the subject—our June article: Executive Vitality™: Take a Deep Breath and Huffington Post: Overtime Work Hurts Health.

Here are several guidelines to keep in mind:

- Stop working before you reach the point of “diminishing returns.” That is, when your thinking slows down, your output drops in quality, and your mood tanks.

- Figure out the smartest way for you to work. For example, do you give yourself a break? Here’s an article with tips on how to actually do this: How to Make Yourself Take a Break From Work

- Question yourself about why you are working too hard, if in fact, you are. Who is pushing you? Most likely it is you. If so, why? What is your motivation? Are you somehow gaining some mental satisfaction or reward from overwork? If it is someone else, what is their motivation? Negotiate.

- Get better at managing your boundaries. What would you tell a direct report who is staying in the office till 9 pm every night?

How can you help yourself get to a healthier workstyle? How can you help those who work with/for you?