



Why “Busy” Is A Useless Word

Shannon Waller: Have you ever noticed that the word busy is often used as an excuse and stops further actions and progress? Stay tuned as we talk about why busy is not the best word to use. Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success. Today, I am going to go on a bit of a rant, a productive one, I don't want to waste your time, about the word busy. We had a fabulous conversation in my workshop the other week with very advanced team leaders about how frustrating this word can be when it is applied to you. Now, I had someone close to me describe me as like, oh, but Shannon, you're always so busy. And I just about lost my mind. It was not a comfortable conversation for either of us. I don't like that word being applied to me. And here's why, because it stops everything in its tracks. Where do you go if someone says, oh, I'm busy, or someone else says about you, oh, you're busy? Where do you go? It is not useful because it is not specific, it is vague, it's ambiguous, and it's overused a lot. So I want to just ditch it, frankly.

And as my brilliant client Rachel and I were talking about, she goes, really? Busy doesn't say what's true. What's true is this particular thing I haven't prioritized. Could be a person, could be a project, could be whatever, but it means that it actually hasn't been a priority. And I think we need to be really careful about the word busy. If you find yourself saying it about somebody else, it may mean that you don't know what to do. You're feeling overwhelmed by the situation. If you are saying it about yourself, same goes. You're feeling overwhelmed, but things really are prioritized is also what that means. So do you have time for your health? Do you have time for your family? Do you have time for a particular project? If somebody is super important to you, you'll make the time. So busy is just now, I'm just reading it as a statement of overwhelm. But that means I am unwilling to stop there. And if someone uses the word busy, no offense, but I'm in their face about it. I'm like, okay, let's talk about what that means. What does that mean when you say I'm busy or you say you're busy? Does it mean you don't have time? Does it mean it's not a priority? Does it mean that your calendar is full? Which, by the way, could be true. You know, there's just so many other more useful ways to talk about it. I think it's really important.

So again, I want to dissuade you from using this word. And I want to kind of highlight in your brain when you hear it from other people, and I want your instinct to be to dive deeper. We'll go through some things you can ask and say in just a moment. But the other thing about the word busy is there's a cultural implication. So there's a lot of social pressure often to be busy. But one of the things that I'm really, really clear on is that busy does not necessarily mean productive or profitable. Are you busy doing the right things? Maybe, maybe not. I'm gonna guess probably not actually, because it just means you're focused on the activity, the busyness, rather than the business. So really, really key. And I got some great coaching from Dan. This was in a workshop. It wasn't just specifically to me, but man, does it ever apply. And Dan goes, a tightly scheduled entrepreneur cannot transform. And I quoted it back to him and I said, a too tightly scheduled entrepreneur cannot transform. He goes, no, no, no, no, no, no, that's not it. A tightly scheduled entrepreneur cannot transform. I was like, oh, no wonder I



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misread that one, because I'm the one with the full calendar, right? So it's critical, like we need to leave space. Busy is not a win. A coach in the Program or as an entrepreneur or an entrepreneurial leader where you want to have space and thinking time to grow, being busy is actually a criticism. It's not a plus. So I think that's key.

The other aspect is that it can actually be an excuse. And I think this is what triggers me a little bit is, you know, people say when they don't want to do something like, well, I'm busy. It's like, yeah, actually, I just don't really want to do it. So it's less than transparent. It's less than authentic. It's less than fully honest. It's like, I have some other priorities right now would actually be more truthful and more of a genuine basis for the conversation and therefore the relationship than just saying, I'm busy. You know, if you get a reputation for being busy, people will stop inviting you, which might be your goal, I will say, depending on the person and the invitations. But it's not useful. It's a convenient excuse. And then also, we miss out on opportunities when we just have that as our default. So a lot of reasons to be very, very conscious. It's a slippery, slimy word. And I would just like to eradicate it from my and other people's vocabularies, especially about me. I just find it annoying. I'm curious as to you do too.

So what can we do as a countermeasure to busy? So let's just walk through a couple of different circumstances. If someone is saying that about you and they say, oh, but we are always so busy. You're like, oh, okay. Tell me why you think that, and be curious, be open. Don't just assume that you know. Is it because I've turned down the last five invitations with you, which may or may not be true? Often it's perception that's not fully based in reality, or they're extrapolating from a few pieces of information into a whole, and it's just not accurate, especially if that person is someone close to you. And you're like, well, yeah, I have a lot on my calendar, but that doesn't mean I don't have time for you. So are you assuming I don't have time for you? So do you see how you're kind of doing that deeper dive and getting to some assumptions? And if you remember what the word assume means from grade three, grade five, makes an ass of you and me? Yeah. What you want to do is really get underneath those assumptions. Do not let those rest. They are not healthy for a productive, useful relationship. So definitely want to do that.

And then if you're feeling busy yourself, then this is the time to coach yourself about this. Like, oh, if I'm feeling busy, hmm, this is time to do a deeper dive. Am I feeling overwhelmed? Answer's almost always going to be yes. What specifically is overwhelming me? Let's take a look at the calendar. Let's prioritize. Again, you know, when Rachel and I had this conversation in the workshop the other week, it was like, yeah, she goes, really, I just haven't prioritized something. So what needs to be prioritized? That is the clue. What are your top three projects? What are your three crucial results? A great Coach tool. What is it that is most important? Do you need to go take a walk? You're just mentally tired and need to go refresh yourself a little bit. So really doing that deeper dive will help you get out of that state of overwhelm, will help you get in touch with reality, will help you get a grip on what truly is, you know, most important



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in that moment so that you can take effective and constructive action. And that is the point. The reason why I don't like busy is it just is like a big red stop sign and I don't know where to go with that. I'm a person of action. I do not like being stopped by something that is vague and confusing and may be an excuse. Not how I roll. Don't think it is how you do either.

So let's dig a little deeper. Let's be super curious, either with ourselves or with those people saying that about us. And we may need to change the conversation. Like, do I have a full calendar? Yeah, I do. Guess why? Because I like being productive. I'm better when I don't have huge chunks of time between things. I do schedule thinking time. Don't worry, that is in there. But on a day where I'm in the office, I've got meetings. Don't give me a half hour meeting and then an hour break and then another half hour meeting. That is not the way to productively schedule Shannon. That's for sure. I'm better when I can stay high energy. I call it going from lily pad to lily pad. I'm going to be hopping and not staying too long in any one. And then I need time at the end to kind of decompress, offload, make sure I connect all the dots, talk to the people with whom I need to connect. But that's not necessarily busy. That's just having a full, energetic calendar. And if you went on the calendar, guess what? I can probably find time for you. Or at least my team can, since that's not my Unique Ability.

But really, if it's a priority, we will make the time. And that happens a lot. So not that I want to rearrange everything, but I make sure that what's on my calendar is in fact a top priority. And I would rather say to you, actually, that's not a priority for me right now than I'm busy, because I'm busy just feels like a lame fill-in-the-blank excuse and I'd rather be more honest and straightforward with you. So that is my take on why busy is a stupid word. I don't want it in my vocabulary or anyone else's. So anyway, I hope you've enjoyed this conversation. Maybe it struck a chord. Maybe it didn't. I'm curious to know. Please let me know at questions@strategiccoach.com. Thank you so much for listening. And as always, here's to your team's success.