



# ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

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## **Net Worth Only a Small Part of Self-Worth; Worklife a Narrow Measure of Success**

*by Jack Roseman*

When I was 43 I was the president of On-Line Systems, a public company. I loved working, as I do now, but then I worked seven days a week, sometimes 18 hours a day. I was a workaholic. My whole *raison d'être* was to grow that company as big as we could and make it as productive and efficient as possible.

We ran three shifts because customers used us 24 hours a day. And the customers who used us at night weren't any less important than the ones who used us during the day, but night shifts sometimes get lax. So I made a rule that when the phone rings, even if it's 3 a.m., I wanted it answered within three rings. I told the night staff, "If I ever call and it doesn't get answered by three rings, I'll assume the building is burning."

So of course I had to call. I'd wake up at 2 a.m. and call, and if no one answered within three rings I would get dressed

and go to work and ask, "Where's the fire?" That's the kind of hands-on management I was accustomed to. At that time I didn't give much thought to the level of stress it was creating in my life.

What I did know was that I was proud of On-Line Systems, and to me, its success was a measure of my own worth. The more I contributed to that success, the better I felt about myself. And in truth, I liked being a hard-driving executive.

Then one Sunday morning in 1973 my wife Judy was surprised when it was almost noon and I hadn't gone into work yet. She asked if I felt alright, and I said I was a little tired, but that I would leave in another hour. So she left to run some errands and I sat there and soon began feeling like I was getting a sore throat. It wasn't much at first, but after a little while I felt short of breath. I asked my son to call his older

sister who was playing next door and tell her I wasn't feeling too well.

She came over and called the doctor, who instantly ordered her to call me an ambulance.

Well, half my heart died that day, and the doctors told Judy they didn't expect me to make it through the night. But I did. And then I made it through the next. Eventually, instead of thinking about dying, I started thinking about what life was going to be like with only half a heart.

When I got back to work it was clear I could no longer get up at 2 a.m. and drive to the office to enforce my customer service policies. Nor could I put in the 18-hour days I had before. If I had any doubts they were dispelled when, for quite a while after I returned to work, Judy would show up every day at 5:30 and inform whomever I was with that it was time for her husband to leave. It could

be a board meeting or a client meeting, she didn't really care. And I always left, because I knew she was right.

But I did begin to think that because I couldn't do as much as I had done before, I was less of a man. It was a harsh judgement, and it sent me down a difficult road. But I think it's also a common judgement made by men - and maybe women - who identify mostly with their work. At the time, I thought I was being realistic and tough-minded. Eventually I realized I was being simpleminded. That insight did not come quickly or easily. But it did come. Eventually.

My worth to On-Line Systems wasn't the number of hours I put in, but the quality of those hours. Because I had to, I learned how to get the same things done in less time. Perhaps more importantly, I learned that who you are to an organization is only a part of who you are. Who you are as a parent, a spouse, a citizen, a neighbor or a friend is also important. It's all these things together that determines who you are as a human being. And that is the judgement that counts.

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