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WHEN SEX IS BAD

Casual sexual behaviour becomes an addiction if it spins out of control – and can eventually destroy one’s job competency and effectiveness

The corporate world is a powerful driving force for the wellbeing of an average worker. But only a small segment of society truly understands the power, prestige, reward, pain and sacrifice that one has to pay to survive in the corporate setting.

Recently, clinical researchers have turned their attention to the issue of addiction in corporate sub-cultures – most notably, sexual addiction – among those who are a part of running the corporate machine, such as executives, directors, supervisors, managers, chairmen and presidents.

This elite, powerful and highly educated group has fascinated researchers, since they have the most resources at their disposal compared to the rest of the population.

Different outcome studies estimated about 35 to 37 percent of active employees in the United States have some form of addiction, which could result in huge financial costs to companies in terms of absenteeism, lost wages, low productivity, job-related injuries and treatment.

Unlike other types of addiction such as drugs or alcohol, sexual addiction – like a gambling addiction – rarely takes a physical toll on the individual at the initial stage.

Paradoxically, sexual addiction takes a while to develop, and it also takes its time to have devastating effects on the person’s social, emotional, relational, spiritual, professional and family life.

It ultimately destroys the person “It is an addiction ... that eats up your soul bit by bit”, said Dr Patrick Carnes, a renowned addiction expert.

Some characteristics of sexual addiction

For sexual addicts, sexual behaviours are most often described by words such as driven, compulsive and hidden.

Unlike healthy sex that is integrated into relationships, sexual addicts use sex as a means to cope, to handle boredom, anxiety, or as a way to feel important, wanted or powerful.

Sexual addiction can include but is not limited to, activities such as excessive masturbation, Internet pornography, visiting prostitutes, voyeurism, exhibitionism, multiple sexual affairs, repetitive sexual flings and compulsive short-term relationships.

Casual sexual behaviour becomes an addiction if you repeat the activity without control, even when you suffer unpleasant consequences. Here are some case examples:

1. Henry is a 38 year-old finance executive for a multinational company. He spends all his spare time collecting thousands of pornographic pictures, stores them in his computer and has been making sexual contact with women through the Internet over the past few years.

He even meets some of these women for daytime sexual affairs and sexual liaisons when traveling on business. He justifies his behaviours by saying that “it doesn’t hurt anybody and “I don’t love these women, so what difference does it make?”

2. Sally, a 41 year-old sales executive, has been in a long-term "monogamous" relationship but continues to seek anonymous sex outside of her marriage.

Though promising herself that she will never repeat the same mistake, she continues to spend time looking for and engaging in different sexual encounters to meet her emotional needs.

Each time she engages in a sexual encounter, she tells herself that it will be "her last time". She consistently lies to her husband and makes up countless excuses about her absences from home. When questioned about these issues, she quickly becomes irritable, angry and defensive.

3. Robert, in his mid-40's, is an award-winning manager at a hardware production company. He does not see anything wrong with simple pats on the butt, commenting on a co-worker's legs or breast size, or making out with secretaries in the lift at the company holiday party, although he tried to approach only women who do not work directly for him.

Married for 11 years, Robert maintains several sexual affairs both at work and with various babysitters and housekeepers hired to work in his home. When he was younger, he was kicked out of a school fraternity when he was accused of having sex with a woman after she passed out from drinking. At the time, he felt that too much was made of the incident, because "after all, we were drinking together".

All these case examples highlight what Dr Carnes calls the "three main characteristics in sexual addiction – shameful, secretive and/or abusive".

These characteristics slowly and certainly destroy the individual's competency and effectiveness in the workplace, strip the person of his dignity and self-esteem, and hit him with shame, guilt and depression.

HOW TO DEAL WITH SEXUAL ADDICTION

1. Admit that you have a problem. Change cannot occur until you have admitted the need for change.
2. Seek professional help early. Like dealing with other addictions, you cannot do it by yourself. Get help from professionals who have training and experience in dealing with addiction.
3. Get help along with your significant other. This may happen in the later phase of intervention.
4. Start joining some recovery support groups, preferably a sex recovery group.
5. Finally, always keep your focus and do not give up if you fail or relapse. There is life beyond sexual addiction.