



The Wellness Skill of not Being 'Busy'

Joe Doty*

Duke University School of Medicine, Durham, NC, USA

***Corresponding author:** Joe Doty, Duke University School of Medicine, Durham, NC, USA**Received Date:** July 12, 2026**Published Date:** August 04, 2026

Introduction

Busy. /'bizē/

Adjective - having a great deal to do.

"He had been too busy to enjoy himself". In the health professions, we hear the word 'busy', arguably every day – or many times a day. "I'm so busy," "I'm too busy", "I'm so sorry, but I've really been busy",... and so on. Arguable, telling others we are 'busy' is an easy or mindless response – almost as perfunctory as responding "Fine", to "How's it going?". If you look at the definitions of the word 'busy', you see that it says one has a lot to do, or is occupied. However, in society today, and especially in the health professions, when the word 'busy' is used, it is most often associated with having too much on one's plate or not being able to handle all the different aspects of one's life – both professionally and personally. However, upon close introspection, what we often lose sight of is that *since* we have great deal to do, we are simply living life and going through the motions - maybe like a rat on a wheel.

Let's take a hypothetical academic orthopedic surgeon committed to being a wonderful fellow human and MD – they would be busy with: clinic, operating room, family, church, research, admin duties, teaching, mentorship, recreational activities, industry collaborations, friends and vacations. But before we even say, "welp that's a busy human", what if I told you that this surgeon says, "Wow, I have many different aspects that encompass what I occupy myself with in life. But I don't feel busy". HOW!?!?! Because this MD *chooses to simply be present in the moment* - cognitively and emotionally. When we have so many different things to engage in during our lives, we need to build the skills of seeing the forest from the trees, then prioritizing, and then making the conscious and subconscious choice to be present in the aspect of life that our one mind and body

are *currently* engaged with. Or as Ron Epstein, MD, says, "Where your feet are [1]".

When that surgeon is in the OR, they are purposefully and intentionally present with that vulnerable patient and team of trainees and workers that make up the OR team. The surgeon is not with their church, research, admin duties, and vice versa. Of course, in life, there are times when different areas of life blend simultaneously. But when we say, "OK, let me just look down at my two feet and be present with the person/task/responsibility in front of me [2]". Quite often, when we say or think "we're busy," what we are doing is focusing on "all" the different things on our plate, instead of living in the moment and being present with what we have in front of us. This lack of self-awareness and self-management is the gateway to giving into stress, worry, anxiety, burnout, and AN INCORRECT ACCEPTANCE that we cannot do or think presently/with intentionality because our minds are so burdened. *It doesn't have to be that way.* Developing the skills of self-awareness and self-management is an important step in addressing the challenge and consequences of being 'busy'. We have so much in life, but each are important and of some value. But there are a time and place for everything, and with intentionality and presence, all things are appropriately addressed and engaged with. So 'busy' is just an excuse to not be present. But being present is the easy cure to managing all in life to not "feel/be busy".

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

References

1. Ron Epstein (2017) *Attending: medicine, mindfulness and humanity*. Scribner Books 67(665): 568.
2. Jon Kabat-Zinn (2018) *Meditation is not what you think – mindfulness and why it is so important*. Hachette Books.