

WHY WE TURN FUN INTO A CHORE

Plus what to do when life has too many "shoulds"



One of the superpowers of social anxiety is *conscientiousness*, a personality trait that leads us to do things well and thoroughly. We're diligent, careful, and detail-oriented. And it serves us well-- according to research, conscientiousness leads to both objective and subjective success in life.

But sometimes we have too much of a good thing. Just like it's possible to have too much ice cream (read: tummy ache) or too much relaxation (read: bored and restless), we can also have an excess of conscientiousness.

An unwanted side effect? Sometimes we turn fun into a chore, or, as perfectionism expert Dr. Alan Mallinger says, we turn **"the volitional into the obligatory."**

An early summer stroll turns into a chore when we "should" get our tracker to an even 3000 steps.

Cooking a lovely new meal turns into a chore when we "should" run to the store to get allspice or buttermilk or tomatillos because the recipe wouldn't be right if we didn't.



Spontaneously picking up our old guitar to play some favorite tunes becomes a chore if we decide we “should” really start practicing again. Twenty minutes a day should do it.

If you see yourself in any of these, it doesn't mean you're doing something wrong. It's not “bad” to set goals, follow rules, or work to improve.

However, if you feel overwhelmed by so many chores in your life that you start to resist, you might consider turning down the conscientiousness from time to time. It's not necessarily that “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” It's more like “all work and no play makes Jack (or you or me) defiant and prone to procrastination.”

In short, when there are too many “shoulds” in our life, we balk: we drag our feet and get resentful, both to ourselves and with the people we love.

**How to unstack our pile of “shoulds”?
Consider testing out some “wants.”**

Along with your to-dos, mix in activities you want to do, **bonus points if they're unproductive.** Read the romance novel rather than the personal development non-fiction. Watch stand up comedy rather than a documentary. Walk to enjoy the weather, not to hit 3000 steps. Eat leftover pizza for breakfast rather than waiting until pizza-appropriate lunch.

It doesn't have to be big. It doesn't have to be indulgent. It just has to be something you'd like to do because it's fun, satisfying, or a relief to give yourself some room to breathe.

This might be harder than it sounds. If you're used to shoulds, or you weren't allowed to have wants earlier in life, test driving a want feels vaguely illegal. But we need both shoulds and wants in our life. Allowing ourselves wants sends the message that a given activity is valid and important *simply because we like it.*

So test out some wants. You'll still have the superpower of conscientiousness. But your life also might be a little more fun.

