

LOST IN TRANSLATION

You're a busy association executive. Of course you have a lot to do—who doesn't? "Taken together, the items on your to-do list will probably require more time than you have to do them," says Burt Woolf, founder and CEO of the Center for Quality of Life. "But you can't really make more time, and doing less is not an acceptable job performance option."

According to Woolf, "The root cause of brain overload is our inability to deal with chatter in the back of our heads—all things that our mind tells us we have to do, we didn't do, or we should have done."

Woolf teaches others to use the tools and techniques of "transformative learning" to change the way they react to the chatter, which he believes is a more achievable and effective objective than trying to eliminate it.

"At the Center for Quality of Life, we help people create a context for living that shifts their interpretation of the chatter," he says. "Instead of experiencing your workload as traumatic or as a crisis, you integrate it into your life's purpose."

This approach trains individuals to focus on things that are fulfilling and meaningful—like making a difference in the world around you. "When you live in a state of meaning and fulfillment, you will be more resilient to face the crazy circumstances around you," says Woolf.

According to Woolf, the strategic pathway to addressing brain overload involves three components of transformative learning:

- Phase I: Listen to the chatter regularly and be ready for the feelings of overload.
- Phase II: Calm down the chatter by engaging your own mind in a reflective, back-and-forth conversation about the overload.
- Phase III: Keep the volume level of the chatter low by reinforcing your quality of life goals on a daily basis—in your professional and personal lives.

Lastly, he suggests that you create a genuine support system around yourself with staff, colleagues, and the board. "Share your own situation and listen compassionately to the stories others will surely tell in exchange. If you're only out to look good to others, or just to get by as a survivor, you'll have to deal with your mind on your own. That's a sure-fire setup for brain overload—or worse, stress and burnout."

Woolf's Picks: Selected Books That Address Quality of Life Issues

The Art of Possibility by Rosamund and Benjamin Zander (Harvard Business School Press, 2000)

The Breakout Principle by Dr. Herbert Benson and W. Proctor (Scribner, 2003)

How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work by Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey (Jossey Bass, 2001)

The Inner Edge: Effective Spirituality in Your Life and Work by Ronald Jue, et. al. (McGraw-Hill, 2002)

