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“Hamster Wheel”

by
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- What** This monologue is a reminder of the danger of workaholism and the erosion that occurs in our souls when work it takes over our lives and we become more like machines than humans.
Themes: Workaholism, Over-Work, Work Life Balance, Purpose, Identity, Success, Time
- Who** Ted
- When** Present
- Costumes and Props** Business casual attire. May be a full suit, but more likely dress shoes, dress pants, dress shirt and tie. Should also have a cell phone.

For set pieces, a treadmill or an elliptical machine is necessary (The elliptical machine may be a better choice as the actor will need to control the pace of their gait). If a set construction budget is allowed, a hamster wheel could be built around the elliptical machine to magnify the absurdity of the scene.
- Why** Psalm 127, Ecclesiastes 1:3, Ecclesiastes 2:17-18, Mark 6:31, Mark 8:36, Luke 5:16
- How** Special attention should be paid to both the pacing as well as the gradual revealing of the cracks in this character. At the beginning, the character is confident, almost arrogant. As time progresses, there is a growing balance of both doggedness and urgency, and the pacing in delivery as well as movement should vary to match the characters progression. Practice with both the machine and checking the phone for texts/emails throughout is highly recommended, so that it appears to the audience that the machines the actor is using are an extension of the actual person.

This piece works great as a lead-in to worship, especially if there is a topically relevant musical number to lead out of it.
- Time** Approximately 4-6 minutes

Ted is dressed in a business suit and carries a Starbucks cup, laptop bag, and phone. He has an earpiece so we think he might be on the phone at first. He is walking briskly, and sometimes sprinting, inside a giant hamster wheel.

Ted: It's rough out there. Cut-throat, back-stabbing, dog-eat-dog world. An economy that's gasping for air. Companies going under. People by the thousands losing their jobs. The media and the politicians would like us to believe things are getting better. Truth is, real life isn't as pretty as our local news networks would like you to believe. Unfortunately, it's a little more like anarchy than any of us would like to admit. Like a real-life Survivor workplace. Hey, don't judge. I didn't decide how things should be.

I'm just calling it like it is. Survival of the fittest, baby.

Speeding up a little.

I'll tell you a little secret I've learned. It's not the big that eat the small. It's the fast that eat the slow. Me? I'm just doing what I have to do to survive. Trying to keep from being voted off the island. A man's got to make a living. It'd be nice to sit in a field smelling daisies all day or spending more time with my family or some big brother type of deal...or helping the homeless, or something. But I've got bills to pay. Daisies smell pretty, but they don't pay the rent. And my family needs a roof over our heads or we'll be one of the homeless ourselves.

So, I do what I have to do. When thrown a deadline to meet or asked if I can tackle whatever this or whichever that, my answer is always "you bet". I'm the guy they call at eleven o'clock at night to put out fires, the one that comes through in a pinch, the man who, in an urgent situation, makes it happen. I keep things afloat, come through in a clutch, sacrifice for the cause.

Slowing a little

Alright. Confession time. I like it. I like to be needed. To feel like I'm productive, contributing something. More than that. To know I'm part of what's driving things. When success rings our doorbell, I take an immense, secret pleasure at knowing that it's darkening our doorstep in part because of me. And the benefits, the stock options and the paycheck don't hurt either. Hey, there's nothing wrong with giving yourself a little security. And if I'm going to meet my ten-year plan, I've got to keep at it.

Looks to the side like someone just passed him or is about to. He starts to jog.

PURCHASE

And so, I'm running. In high gear. Go, go, go. Working days in the teens, and nights and weekends too. It isn't the big that eat the small. It's the fast that eat the slow. And I'm not about to be outpaced. It's rough out there, remember? And I've got plans.

(slowing) Sure, sometimes, not always, but every once in a while, I wonder. Those nagging questions start to surface. There are little moments, like sitting at the doctor's office and hearing you have high blood pressure and wondering if you'll even live to see your ten-year plan come to pass. Or the two minutes you get on the weekends to sit and relax only to discover you don't really know how to relax anymore at all. Or hearing guys at the office talk about how their marriages fail and their kids are estranged because they are so committed to their work. And they're talking about all this...this tragedy...like their loss is something to aspire to. *(his pace grows more dogged)* You live your life like it's a fire drill. Go, go, go. Get up, go to work, come home, go to bed. Get up, go to work, come home, go to bed. And sometimes it feels like it's gotten out of control. Like you don't really have a choice anymore. And you begin to wonder. What's it all for? What does 'quality of life' really mean, anyway? And where did I go? When did I turn into this...this...soul-less...robot? This...empty...suit? *(slowing almost to a stop)* What would happen if I just...stopped?

Freezes and looks outside the wheel for a second, like he's noticing his surroundings for the first time, but then shakes his head.

Starts walking again and slowly speeding up.

WATERMARK

But then you think of the bills and the deadlines and the economy and the hundreds of people in line for your job and that feeling of being needed added to the fact that it really doesn't feel all that great to think about all this stuff in the first place, and what's the use of sitting still when you can't really relax anyway? And so, it's back to the hamster wheel. Go, go, go.

'Cause it's rough out there. A cut-throat, back-stabbing, dog-eat-dog world. And it isn't the big that eat the small. It's the fast that eat the slow. So, you keep running...through the fatigue...those times you can't catch your breath...you keep running.

Continues in an almost frantic pace as the lights fade.

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