

Star Hunting: The Anxiety Demon In Tinseltown

The celebrity lifestyle is the food the demon feeds on, but there is a way out!

By Faust Ruggiero, M.S.

Each year, we see the list of celebrities who suffer from anxiety and panic attacks, sharing their own personal experiences. Many are hoping to educate others regarding this insidious human condition, while others are affiliating themselves with organizations to help people address their own anxiety related concerns. Though so many people who suffer from anxiety do not report the condition, or seek help for it, an estimated 31.1% of U.S. adults experience a problem with anxiety at some time in their lives. This is probably a conservative estimate.

Anxiety is often described as a demon that has taken control of one's life, and is powerful enough to turn its victims into helpless and directionless souls, at times, feeling almost incapable of making decisions, and plotting the course of their lives. People who struggle with anxiety often have a difficult time even with the simplest of tasks. It's hard to keep your mind focused enough to accomplish a goal when you feel as though the world around you is going to collapse at any moment. At the very least, it's just hard to sit in one place attempting to do what it takes to complete a desired chore when you feel like you want to jump out of your own skin.

Life in the fast lane; Not always

On the surface, it's easy to explain away a good deal of anxiety's celebrity symptomatology to the fast-paced, look right, be perfect, always in the spotlight, emotional pressure cooker that can define the lifestyle. Much of that makes perfect sense. It's a very demanding way to live. However, there is far more to it. The anxiety demon has no concerns whatsoever regarding someone's career path. It does not discriminate in its victim selection process, and though lifestyle, career, and other personal and social choices may be contributing factors, their role is not as pronounced as you might think.

All too often, we tend to look for a specific causal agent to explain the onset of anxious symptoms. We make the assumption that something that happened, or something that we are doing is causing the anxiety. Environmental factors do, in fact, play a significant role in both the onset and the manifestation of anxiety. So, an involved lifestyle, one that is fast-paced and demanding, can certainly instigate, and worsen the symptoms.

The other part of the formula is the person's own physical, intellectual, and emotional makeup. Some people are simply more susceptible to anxiety than others. So, to simply assume that the celebrity lifestyle causes anxiety would be a bit simplistic. Over the last three decades, those celebrities I have counseled do show the wear and tear from a demanding and accelerated style of life. That, however, could happen to anyone. In anyone's life, the choices they make will have a direct impact on what they experience. So, let's take a look what people living life in a position of notoriety and celebrity status can experience. This list comes directly from those individuals who I have counseled.

- **Accelerated life pace** - The change in life pace can range from moderately accelerated to out of control.
- **Feeling as though you are routinely under the microscope** - It's a spotlight business, and it is often difficult to escape the magnified *misperceptions*.
- **Public scrutiny** - For many, it seems like every move they make is scrutinized by the media, and the public.
- **Scheduling demands, and long work hours** - Many celebrities report exceptionally long hours, and demands on their time which are often unrealistic.
- **Loss of privacy, often with personal life exposed** – It's is a media/public relations business. Private lives tend to be surrendered, and personal boundaries are routinely crossed.
- **Limitations regarding routine public endeavors** - Many celebrities miss the freedom of a tranquil evening out at the local coffee shop. Many report feeling as though they are constantly watched, with boundaries routinely violated.

- **Family life constraints** - Long hours, travel, and the accelerated life pace often cut into quality family time. Also, families can fall victim to the same privacy issues, placing restrictions on their freedom and mobility.
- **Rejection issues** - Many talk of the cutthroat nature of the business, and the routine feelings of rejection that come with harsh judgments, and the difficulty finding a safe niche.
- **Image concerns** - In this business, image is everything. The pressure to look good, say the right thing, and be what everyone expects you to be is a daunting way to live life.
- **The age game** - The industry has an obsession with age, and looking good. Many celebrities see an employment window that can quickly disappear as they move through middle age.
- **The Success/Failure Exposé** - In professions where public scrutiny either doesn't exist, or is that a minimum, one has the ability to champion their successes, but also hide their failures. That isn't always the case with celebrities. As a result, there is a constant fear of failure, and the backlash which can occur when “failures” go public.
- **Pressure to stay on top** - Visibility and the pressure to remain a hot commodity, or, at the very least, maintain quality work experiences, can place celebrities in a never ending cycle of people pleasing endeavors.
- **Relationship issues** - It's hard to maintain relationships with significant others when there is very little available time, and when one is constantly submitting to business related demands. Relationships also become difficult due to the stress and anxiety that interferes with communication and intimacy.
- **Personal attacks** - In addition to the close scrutiny and criticism celebrity experience, they live in a constant world of king of the hill. Attacks come from any direction, and often, for no particular purpose. At times, bullying from others seems to be the norm.
- **Trust issues** - In this cutthroat, need to stay on top world, it's often difficult to know who to trust. Personal agendas and compromised loyalties can drive even trusted friends to make decisions that can cause serious pain.

- **Loneliness** - Though it's a business which constantly has one surrounded by all different kinds of people, there is a loneliness that develops when the need for safe close relationships are minimized, or seemed to disappear altogether.
- **The perfection syndrome** - Nothing is ever good enough, not for the critics, the fans, and particularly those who have control over one's life. There is the push for perfection which never seems to become reality, at least, not in their eyes.
- **Compromised sleep and nutrition issues** - Fast-paced living, long hours, and so many unrealistic demands can quickly cut into healthy life routines. Many report difficulty sleeping, and healthy nutrition tends to fall by the wayside.
- **Substance abuse** – As a way to deal with all the pressures, there is a tendency to turn to substances to medicate the pain, and at the very least, to relax their minds. These can develop into very significant habits, and addictions.
- **Understanding the celebrity lifestyle** - There is working hard to arrive at higher states of living, and then there is understanding how to live there. No one teaches celebrities how to live as celebrities. It's often baptism by fire.
- **Unresolved past issues** - We all have a life timeline, and unresolved past issues can be problems. These are particularly more significant in an accelerated lifestyle, which is uncompromising, seemingly always public, often borders on abusive, and doesn't seem to include many safe places. Sometimes, a celebrity's past becomes a juicy and painful publicity exposé.
- **Unaddressed anxiety and depression** - Though anxiety and depression can seem to develop in the celebrity lifestyle, it's important to keep in mind these conditions may have been present long before one ascends into the lifestyle. The pressures from public notoriety only exacerbates these problems.
- **Glam events** - Glamorous events, and all those tantalizing red carpet-like occasions are often nothing more than one more demand to look perfect, be perfect, and be scrutinized.

- **Paparazzi and other stalkers** - In some cases, it's merely fans not understanding or respecting boundaries. In other cases, it's a vicious never ending cycle of stolen life moments, and personal invasions. Some are more vicious than others.
- **Running the stop signs** – There are always red flags that tell us that something needs to be done. In the throes of a life that moves fast, is demanding, and loaded with all kinds of pressure, those intellectual/emotional stop signs can seem to become invisible. Before you know it, the anxiety demon has you.
- **Exaggerated people pleasing** - In a world where we preach being your own person, setting boundaries, and being master of their own destiny, the in control power people need to be pleased, and so do the fans. It seems as celebrities are almost always at the mercy of someone else's demands.
- **Enough is never enough** - This is a business where you can never do enough. The more you do, the more people will demand. It's hard to find the shut off valve.
- **The adoration/reciprocity syndrome** - Much is written about celebrity adoration, but this can be a mutual affair. Fans have their own reason to need the celebrities they want to be close to. This, however, can become a mutual love affair, where healthy perspectives can be compromised, and emotional dependence can develop.
- **Survival Induced Arrogance** – In a world that can come at you rapidly and, at times, viciously, a tough exterior seems to be a powerful defense. Unfortunately, it only make matters worse, as others misunderstand who you are, and attack with even greater fury.
- **Suicidal ideation** - Sometimes you just want to make it all go away. It's not uncommon to hear celebrities, just like everyone else with accelerated demanding lifestyles, look for ways to shut off their heads, and make the insanity go away.

Feeding In

Productive and happy lives are almost always the product of the combination of maximizing positive people, places, and things, while, at the same time,

reducing, and if possible, eliminating those that may hurt us. In all I do, I consistently teach the concept of neurological normalization, that is, the brain's ability to initially accept, and then embrace what we choose to do in our lives, even when those choices may produce negative consequences.

Tinseltown 's anxiety demon feeds on negative life choices. It loves to move fast, and feeds on the addiction to life in the fast lane. It's difficult to make positive life choices with the pedal to the metal. Soon enough, the brain's ability to understand the potentiality of those choices becomes compromised, and the star-studded celebrity prison becomes a normalized way of life. Here, the demon is unleashed, maximizing anxiety's potential to become a normal way of conducting life.

The collateral damage that can accompany celebrity status through the tendency to normalize potentially dangerous life choices becomes an accepted way of living. "I know this can happen, but it's part of the life, and somehow, I will make it work". Interestingly, one of the more damaging normalized thought patterns is a misguided understanding that collateral damage is part of being a celebrity. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There are always choices, and staying healthy in the demon infested world of anxiety depends on it.

It's A Job

Many years back, an actor I was counseling told me that in his opinion, the reason so many celebrities fall is that they forget who they are, and what they're doing. He stressed being true to oneself, and also the notion that *being a celebrity is not the job*. He said that is not who he is, and he wasn't buying into it. He stressed focusing on the work, and at the end of the day, leaving it on the set. Having experienced the consequences of celebrityhood, he stressed learning to understand the separation between life and work, and how to keep the balance.

There is what we do in our lives, and there is who we are. Those two concepts may overlap, and, in fact, they will. The first key is always the balance between them. The other, and equally important concept is making the choice as to which one it's more important. We should never come home to our work. No one should attempt to assume the role of a celebrity, and all the pressure that comes

with it, in one's own home. We must always come home to ourselves. Balance, personal health, and our own sanity depend on our willingness, and the initial decision to define and maintain one's own identity and personal space. Then, it is important to defend that space.

Normal, Balanced, and Loved

There is much to be said about setting goals, even lofty goals, and achieving them. Sometimes, those goals are simple, with little potential for collateral damage. Others, being far more connected to our own internal passions and emotional needs, do possess the ability for adverse life changes, and more involved collateral concerns. The celebrity lifestyle is no exception. Understanding that being a celebrity is not who you are is the important first step. It's difficult to address intellectual and emotional concerns while you're focusing on a style of life loaded with mirage like temptations, often with the potential to pay huge dividends. One can lose oneself there. Always make it about the work. Then, leave it, and learn to come back to yourself.

When someone walks into my office living a celebrity style of life, it would be foolish for us to focus our efforts on fixing the celebrity. Rather, what is important is connecting with the whole person, and that runs far deeper than the creations of Tinseltown. Outside of those individuals born into celebrity families, very few people take their first life breaths as celebrities. We are all people first. As long as we remember this, addressing any issue in life, even those that accompany celebutante living, are remarkably enhanced.

Making it Happen

It would be nice if the movement to enter careers that may produce celebrity living could be preceded by an educational curriculum to help its apprentices to understand what is going to happen in their lives before they get there. Unfortunately, that is not the case. For some, they are inherently strong enough, and possess sound reasoning abilities to avoid collateral damage. Others will make decisions to obtain help for any of the numerous pitfalls that can accompany the lifestyle. Others, sadly, will succumb to the demon.

It's advisable to take an inventory of what is happening in your life. Look at what has happened since your movement into the lifestyle, what is occurring presently, and if possible, what may happen based upon your current life path. Ask yourself if the celebrity style of life is compromising your health physically, intellectually, emotionally, and even spiritually. Since this is such an accelerated and pressured way to live, try to stay away from the notion that you can do it yourself. If you're beginning to ask yourself what this life is doing to you, *consider that your own personal red flag*. You may be telling yourself you need some help.

There are many important steps to take to keep yourself healthy in the accelerated, and anxiety demon controlled world of celebrity living. They are:

- ❖ **The Work** - If you got into this business to be a celebrity, that may have been your first mistake. Do your best to focus on the work. The rest of it will take care of itself.
- ❖ **Know the industry** - To efficiently strategize and maneuver in any business requires a sound knowledge of the parameters associated with it. Too many people arrive at a new position in life, and simply make attempts to live there without understanding the facts and the “rules” that apply. Spend a reasonable amount of time learning about the business before the business takes over your life.
- ❖ **Build your inner circle** - It's much easier to navigate in business settings when you have a team in place, one that is efficient, and one that you can trust. Always remember that what you have entered is not only a lifestyle, but also a business. Include the people that are necessary, and make them people who have earned your trust. They know you, understand you, and accept you for who you are. They want the best for you. With them, you can create a reciprocal trustful and loving relationship that will always be there for you.
- ❖ **Take care of your past** - Everyone has one, and the intelligent way to live is to settle old scores and old traumas before you make them part of your new world, especially one that is fast paced, demanding, and very public. Get help if you don't feel you can successfully do this on your own.
- ❖ **The Interviews** - It's a publicity and media business, but you don't have to become a slave to it. Those who are interviewing you need you more than

you need them. Keep that in mind, and learn to control who interviews you, when, and how. Set your boundaries with regard to public interviews, and stick with them.

- ❖ **The Family** - When all is said and done, your personal life has to be the most important part of your world. At all costs, protect your family, and your relationships. Your life will revolve around the choice you make. You will either become a slave to a cutthroat and impersonal business, or you will establish a safe loving foundation that can be the driving force behind everything you do.
- ❖ **Personal Boundaries** - Remember, it's a business, and that never supersedes who you are as a person. Try to slow down as much as you can, carefully review the facts and the information in any and all situations, and set your boundaries with regard to what needs to be done, and your willingness to do it. Then, be willing to tenaciously defend those boundaries.
- ❖ **Privacy** - Loss of privacy is difficult for anyone. We all need to keep our personal lives private. This gives us the room we need to address important issues, and also provides us time to catch our intellectual and emotional breath. It's a media business, but you don't need to take it home with you, and it's important to understand the difference between the media, and protecting your personal life, and your family. At all costs, keep your private life private.
- ❖ **Don't sell your soul** - It's an industry full of passion, and everything you've always wanted to be. This is how you can be led in directions where you don't need to go. This is where you do things you'll look back and say you should never have done. This is where you get used. Nothing in the world is worth the loss of your dignity, your self-respect, and your soul. Go slow. Think about every move. Don't be afraid to say no.
- ❖ **The Down The Road Syndrome** - Too many celebrities tell themselves that they'll take the punishment for a given period of time, and then somehow arrive at a point where they are either in control, or they can walk away. This isn't as easy as you think, and all too often, that period of time is undefined, and doesn't happen. Try not to placate yourself on this one.
- ❖ **Personal Time** - Everyone needs personal time, and the amounts each of us needs may vary. No business venture should ever consume the majority of your life. Even one that you love can have disastrous effects if you don't

program some time away from it. Personal time is a function of how much you need, what you have chosen to do, how often, and with who. Make that time special, and do it as often as you can.

- ❖ **Self-Care** - This is a concept that is undefined for many people. No machine runs forever without a sound maintenance program. A celebrity lifestyle is no exception. If you're going to be successful in the business end of your life, it's important to take care of yourself physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Your success in this business, and the longevity you may hope for depend on your being strong enough to make it all happen.
- ❖ **Know the warning signs** – This is a push the limits business. Success can depend on how strong you are, and how always ready you seem to be. Not understanding when you need a break can lead you to periods of intense anxiety, depression, and eventually, celebrity burnout. You can wait until the problem starts, or you can program those all-important periods of downtime into your schedule.
- ❖ **The Balance** - Happy productive lives, those that can withstand the rigors of a demanding business life, always depend on the balance one programs into one's life. Try not to make your career the most important thing in your world. It is simply one aspect of your life. Take a good look at all the pieces in your life, and be passionate about breathing life into all of them. No one ever said that you have to be a slave to the rest of the world.
- ❖ **Stay humble** - Humility doesn't mean that you cower to the business, or that you are weak. It does mean that you are open to taking advice from the people you trust, and that you continue to remain a student, and keep learning about what is important in your life. Remember this: no one becomes wise without humility. It just might save your life.
- ❖ **Be important to yourself** - The business should never become more important than your health, your personal life, and your sanity. Be careful when it comes to surrendering your dignity and your values. Go slow, and don't compromise who you are. Be your own personal loving gatekeeper, and decide who gets in, and who does not.
- ❖ **The Confidant** - Everyone needs a little help from time to time, some, more often than others. Try to identify and incorporate that go to person in your life. This is where you go and bear your soul. There are no judgments, no pressures, and you don't have to be anything but yourself. You can trust that

person, and they have the ability to help you. Make that someone who can understand you, the business you're in, and how to balance all the various components of your life. It could be a family member, a close friend, or a professional counselor. This one is invaluable. Use it often, *especially when you don't think you need it.*

Learning to live in your new world, and staying happy there...Defining Parameters

Very few of us will arrive at particular destinations in our lives and say that it's exactly what we thought it would be when we got there. It would be nice if the entertainment world, and the fans who follow it, would have their primary focus on the work celebrities do, and not the drama being conjured up about them. Many people entering into the celebrity lifestyle had very little understanding of what they were getting into. This can be a wonderful and rewarding life, and offers experiences, both personal and professional, that have the potential to add an exhilarating dimension to one's life.

However, every movement forward, and the ascension into new and more fascinating levels of living, requires an adjustment to the people, places, and things that exist there. It's important to take some time to understand the lay of the land, and to include the necessary life pieces to both adjust there, and to be happy there. No one expects anyone to simply arrive with an expertise in living in a world without defined boundaries and healthy parameters.

Do yourself a favor, and pay a special attention to that inner circle. If you need help from someone, maybe a counselor or another professional, it's better to create that relationship early, rather than wait for the problems to develop. Make that person someone who not only understands you, but also understands those celebrity life parameters you have chosen to bring into your world. A life lived happy is a life lived well. Living well depends on family, friends, balance, and making the decisions that provide you with the best opportunity for success. It's your world. Be a celebrity, but be a happy celebrity. Take care of yourself and your family, and keep the demon from feeding on your world. There's a wonderful person inside all of us. Love yours!

Faust Ruggiero is the award-winning author of The Fix Yourself Empowerment Series, and the new *The Fix Your Anxiety Handbook*.

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