

# EMPLOYMENT TIMES

Sunday September 26, 2010

MAKING OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

## Personal development: Why work?

How many people do you know who are happy with their jobs? Perhaps you are one who is working just to survive and make ends meet, deriving little satisfaction from your employment. Those who find fulfillment, joy and contentment in their work do exist, but they are not the majority. One thing is sure: to be fulfilling and ultimately satisfying, work needs a long-range goal and an overall opportunity for personal development.

The many books, articles and reports that address the state of various national workforces testify to the fact that something is fundamentally wrong with the modern approach to working life. Note this comment from an anonymous essay on the Internet: "Work" as we know it tends to make us unhappy because we do so much of it, because it is so repetitive, because we don't get to choose what we do, and because what we are doing is often not in the best interest of our fellow human beings." Many of us could echo that observation.

Of course, a number of factors contribute to the sense of well-being we can draw from our employment. Similarly there are specific causes for the dissatisfaction that workers experience. Identifying them may provide some helpful insight.

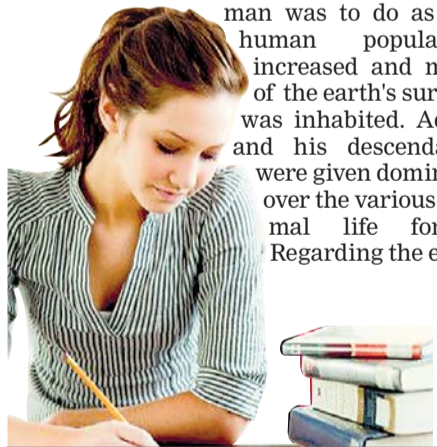
### HARD QUESTIONS

Do we have the courage to ask ourselves whether it's possible that people weren't intended to live and work as we do today? Of course, there are implications behind such a bold question; namely, that we did not evolve from a primeval life form but were created by a divine Being. Could it be possible that work has become such a burden today because we are not "working" in the way the One who created us intended?

Let's take a moment to put aside any preconceived notions we might have and explore this line of thinking to see whether there is a relationship between the purpose of human existence and where we are today in terms of work. The Bible simply says that man was created in the image and likeness of God. Religion and the Bible describes the human form but also addresses the purpose of life. In the first chapters of the Bible God reveals Himself not as a singular entity but in a family relationship—Elohim in Hebrew. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we learn that Jesus Christ was known as "the Word" before He came in human form. As the Word He was with God and He was God. So, long before the earth and human life existed, there were two Beings who have always existed.

Humankind was created to have a physical relationship with God that would develop into an eternal, spiritual family relationship—to become "sons of God," as the New Testament expresses it: "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19). Whereas animals were made after their own kind, man was made after the God kind, a unique creation with a unique purpose.

Having created the physical human form complete with a conscious mind, God gave humans stewardship over the earth. The Garden of Eden was a perfect environment and provided the training ground for what man was to do as the human population increased and more of the earth's surface was inhabited. Adam and his descendants were given dominion over the various animal life forms. Regarding the envi-



ronment, he was told to "tend and keep it," or nurture and preserve it.

Humanity was set to work, living as a physical entity. But unlike animals, during their lifetime humans were to take on the mind and character of the One who had created them, to develop in His likeness. To facilitate this development of character, God gave humans work to do and guidelines for how that work was to be performed.

Unfortunately, the story we see in the first few chapters of Genesis is that almost from the very beginning people refused to work in compliance with the way of life God set before them, choosing instead to "do their own thing." Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden and allowed to decide for themselves the way of life they wanted to live. Mankind had refused the fruit of the tree of life, which would have provided a continuing close relationship with the Creator and the environment He had created.

The original concept of work was bound up in a family-oriented relationship with the environment such that we could realistically refer to it as a way of life. God intended work to be part of our way of life. Our efforts were to be directly tied to the support and development of His family through stewardship of land and animals. In modern parlance we would say we are to take ownership, or responsibility, for the environment in which we live and for the positive development of home and family. This supplies purpose to human efforts and results in a great sense of fulfillment.

Ownership is a vital key to worker satisfaction. In the context of our personal labor, it means we will be doing things that we feel are productive and useful. This can be accomplished to some degree even in today's urban environment. Obvious examples are starting our own business or working in a small partnership where the various tasks undertaken lead to the construction of the whole. If we look at the Garden of Eden model, the key to worker satisfaction would be ownership of land. Not just a suburban lot, but land enough to require the effort of all family members in providing for the family unit. In the original model there was no urbanization or specialization as we know it today.

Ownership of land creates a bonding by virtue of economic interest. It also ensures direct benefit for any work invested, as well as the emotional reward of seeing results for personal effort. It helps build loyalty as the effort of each member of the family contributes to the greater whole rather than merely to self-fulfillment.

### PURPOSE-DRIVEN WORK

For physical and mental endeavors to be meaningful and rewarding, they must have purpose. A goal beyond sustaining physical life can inspire and motivate to great accomplishments. But when the horizon becomes blurred and the peaks of success appear an impossible dream, there is no reason to strive to do better. We become bogged down in mediocrity and too easily satisfied. Temporary pleasures seem to be all that is left within reach, so we busy ourselves with comforts and enjoying life and leave altruistic pursuits to others.

Unfulfilling jobs sap our energy and imagination. But even the most menial of tasks, if performed for a purpose and with a worthwhile end in view, are rewarding. Much of the satisfaction we can draw from work springs from our mental approach and our focus on the future. Most in the Western world are working toward the goal of a comfortable retirement. Sadly, by the time they get there they may find that their health has broken down and their families have disintegrated.

Is it a coincidence that as we grow older (and, we hope, wiser), our thoughts tend to turn to getting away from the rat race of sub-

urban life? Our perspective shifts and our families become more important to us. The Harry Chapin song "Cat's in the Cradle" comes to mind. There were planes to catch and bills to pay, and too late he discovered that his son had grown up to be just like him. Our children will grow up and inherit the moral values we inadvertently or deliberately instill in them. They will either work hard with

goals in mind for themselves and their families, or they will struggle aimlessly though life and wonder whether it's really worth the effort. Teaching the importance of hard work and perseverance is valuable, but helping our children establish the goal of building character, helping others and working toward an eternal future is priceless.

Perhaps we should not wait until we are old

to begin to address the fundamentals of making our working life happy, fulfilling and supportive of family-oriented values. It will require a reassessment of our attitude toward work and work-related values, placing work where it was intended to be in the first place, within the original value system and in a broad family context.

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## Are You -- or Someone You Know -- a Workaholic?

Does this scenario sound familiar to you? You love your work and are responsible for multiple projects and tasks that continue to be assigned to you or your group. You actually thrive on the multiple deadline pressures. Or perhaps you hold multiple jobs or own your own business. Your work hours are long, your at-home hours short, and your sleep hours few. Vacations and social visits with friends are a distant memory. Your only hobby is your job.

It's pretty likely that you -- or someone you know -- is a workaholic. Workaholics live for their work, often spending many extra hours at work, and often taking work home to complete.

Americans -- when compared to many other countries -- are typically a work-hard culture, but when work becomes the sole reason for a person's existence above more important things (such as family and friends), the issue becomes critical.

Part of the matter is societal. Americans are working more hours per week than in years past, and with all the downsizings and con-

solidations and lack of replacement hirings, more and more workers are putting in extra hours to complete the work previously completed by others. Some studies show that as much as many as 40 percent of workers don't even bother to take vacations, partly because of fears they may not have a job to come back to if they do.

Part of the matter is technological. We live and work in a connected environment -- e-mails, instant messaging, fax machines, cell phones, and digital assistants -- making it hard for workers to truly get time away from their work.

Part of the matter is financial. Whether it is how more and more of us mistakenly



define success in terms of financial and materialistic measures or the fact that many Americans simply must work multiple jobs simply to earn a living wage and keep their families out of poverty, we are working more and more for the financial outcomes.

Regardless of the reasons, workaholism can be a serious condition that can lead to the decline and destruction of families, as well as to serious stress-related health problems. When work becomes the sole reason for being -- when it becomes the only thing we think about, the only thing that truly makes us happy -- then it is time for some sort of intervention. And do not confuse hard work for workaholism. Hard workers know the boundaries between work and personal times and can function normally when not at work, while workaholics have no personal times and cannot function well outside of work.

So, are you -- or more likely someone you know since a workaholic probably would not take the time to read this article -- a workaholic? - [quintcareers.com](http://quintcareers.com)