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In The Globe

Wretched times for the worker

By Jon Boroshok [▶ MORE TECH NEWS](#)

The recent layoffs and media frenzy about downsizings prove that in today's business world, employees are commodities, treated like disposable equipment to achieve ratios for Wall Street. There's such emphasis on short-term stock price and shareholder value that there is no long-term strategy. Despite talking a good game about "community" or "balance," there is no appreciation or respect for workers and their families, and loyalty is an antiquated liberal ideal.

As top executives continue to receive huge bonuses for putting people out of work, the "live to work" mentality raises many serious questions. Will we ever return to some sort of balance in our lives? Will we fight harder to keep that balance once we land our next jobs, or are we going to just be thankful that we still have a job?

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Today's working conditions don't compare to the sweatshops of the early 20th century, but the lack of respect for employees' own time, the steady erosion of the 40-hour, five-day work week, and its impact on families, resembles conditions that led to the proliferation of labor unions. Rather than hourly, manual laborers needing some relief and protection, now it's white-collar workers and lower/middle management feeling the pain in the name of shareholder value.

Until recently, we heard about how productivity had increased in this country. Maybe that's because we were all working so many "free" hours. Traditionally in this country, a salary buys the employer 40 hours of an employee's time each week. Salaried folks (especially managers) are exempt from overtime pay and often work longer hours, but if they miss work, that 40-hour figure is used to determine any prorated loss of pay.

If you regularly work a 50-hour week, you "give away" 25 percent extra time. Over the course of a year, it's like working for 3 three months for free. Regularly work a 60-hour week, and it's like throwing in an extra 50 percent.

New technology has not made life easier -- it's made work more intrusive after hours. Cellphones, e-mail, and pagers have blurred the separation between work and life. It's getting harder to just do a good job and go home. The office is everywhere -- we're even expected to check voice mail and e-mail while on vacation.

Is it accurate to call long hours a "choice?" As more people started putting in long hours, the alternative was really to do the same, quit or get fired/downsized. Many of the jobs created in the market were dot-com or tech jobs, and it was hailed as the "New Economy." People put in 50, 60, even 70-plus-hour weeks under the guise of "being competitive." Competitive with what?

How many salaried workers have had bosses or clients who worked nights and weekends, and expected employees to do the same? How many of them wound up with worthless options, broken marriages, and still lost jobs when their companies decided to "right-size"?

In what some consider a "free-agent economy," one way out is self-employment. When my first child was born, I decided that I wanted to be home for dinner on more than just weekends. I wanted to be a father, not a wallet. I wanted my daughter to know who I am, not just what I was able to provide for her. I wanted to be able to hold a conversation about something other than work when I went to a social event. By branching out on my own, I was able to decide how much is enough, and be able to say no to too much work.

These days my revenues have slowed to a trickle -- and being old enough to remember the 1980s and '90s, I think things will get worse before they get better. Luckily, I didn't overextend myself waiting for my lottery tickets (options) to be worth something and making me even more dependent on a corporate culture that couldn't care less. As you sit in your cubicle nervously reading this, fearing that you'll be caught and fired for "not being a team player," answer this simple question: Am I ranting liberal or simply a voice of reason? Speak up, let your voice be heard!

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