

WORKING

Not Funny Ha Ha

Funny peculiar.

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Illustration by Belle Mellor

Killing time

Americans get the least amount of vacation time among countries in the industrialized world—an average of 8.1 days after a year on the job and 10.2 days after three years, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In fact, reports a survey conducted by the online travel company Expedia.com, U.S. workers will be taking 10 percent less vacation time than they did last year.

Australians, for example, are guaranteed—by law—four weeks of annual

vacation time and often receive more in negotiations with their employers. In contrast, 13 percent of U.S. companies now offer no paid leave, up from 5 percent five years ago, says the Society for Human Resources Management. In the state of Washington, 17 percent of workers get no paid leave.

A grass-roots campaign is under way to lobby for a law mandating a minimum of three weeks of paid leave. Thousands have signed the petition and shared their sad tales, such as illnesses caused by overwork. On the

other hand, the U.S. House just approved a rewrite of wage and hour regulations that basically turns anyone who holds “a position of authority” into a salaried employee who can be required to work unlimited overtime for no extra pay. By the way, House reps get one-month vacation yearly.

Ten years ago, there was even a book, *The Overworked American*, by Juliet Schor. Now, that trend is off the charts:

- | 40 percent of Americans work more than 50 hours a week
- | 56 percent of employees will be postponing their vacations until business and economic conditions improve
- | One out of five employees say they “feel guilty” taking their vacations.

Study after study supports the notion that sufficient time off improves, not hinders, productivity. In one example, a Cincinnati-based maintenance-services firm said that after a new liberal vacation policy went into effect, employee turnover dropped and employee morale and productivity rose. One study shows that you get no more done by working seven 50-hour work weeks in a row than by working seven consecutive 40-hour work weeks. Europe—where, as we’ve said, workers get ample vaca time—has had a higher productivity growth than the United States in most years from 1981 to 2000.

In addition, overwork costs employers about US\$150 billion a year in stress-related absences. An annual vacation can cut a person’s risk of heart attack by 50 percent, according to medical experts.

Not funny ha ha, but funny peculiar that the United States, the symbol of freedom, is so parsimonious with free time for its workers.

<|)Source/the Washington Post, joe@worktolive.info

It Was the Best of Times, It Was the Worst of Times

With apologies to Dickens, there’s a time for everything.

According to some tips in *Good Housekeeping*, here are the most opportune times or days to attack certain work tasks:

Tackle difficult projects. 9 a.m. That’s when you’re still fresh and best able to pay attention to details.

Send email. 10 a.m. or 2 p.m. It’s a telemarketer’s trick: Send messages after recipients are most likely to have scanned their morning or afternoon email. At other times of the day, your email might be deleted without having been read. After 4 in the afternoon, most people are too busy to look at their email.

Make or return phone calls. 11:30 a.m. People tend to be less chatty as the lunch hour approaches, so your call should go efficiently and quickly.

Ask for a raise. Thursdays. People (including bosses) are more agreeable towards the end of the week, but don’t ask on a Friday; by that day, people are beginning to experience stress again because they didn’t get everything accomplished for the week.

