



The Time of Your Life!

You may have heard the sayings, "You spend a third of your life at work, so you might as well enjoy what you do." Or "You spend more time with the people at work than you do with your family."

This comment suggests that work is a significant part of our lives. But what about other aspects of our lives - home, family, friends? Which influence is stronger?

Can we find a balance between home and work?

Crunching the Numbers

To answer these questions, let's look at how much time we actually spend at work each year. It may help explain why we sometimes look at work as the major force in our lives.

- First, let's calculate the number of hours in a year:

$$(365 \text{ days/year}) \times (24 \text{ hours/day}) = \underline{8,760} \text{ hours/year}$$

- Now, let's calculate the number of hours we work in a year:

52 weeks a year

Less 3 weeks vacation (estimated average)

Less 1 week other leave (estimated average)

Less 2 weeks - designated holidays (Thanksgiving, Xmas etc)

46 weeks of work per year

To allow for commute and prep time, let's say the average workweek has 45 hours.

$$(46 \text{ weeks}) \times (45 \text{ hours/week}) = \underline{2,070} \text{ hours of work/year}$$

The percentage of our time spent at work each year is...

(Drum roll please)

$$2070/8760 = \underline{24\%} \text{ (less than } \frac{1}{4} \text{ of the year!)}$$

And if you have additional vacation or take advantage of other leave options, the time spent at work is even less!

Work and Life

So, if only 24% of our year is actually spent at work and not at home, why do we sometimes feel it's the other way around?

Especially in times of work conflict, why does the thought of work seem to control the other 76% of our life?

After all, that would be like letting the waiter's tip influence what you thought of your entire dining experience.

Part of the reason is because work is an important factor in our lives.

Let's take a look at what coming to work does for us.

Our Basic Needs

In his book, 'From Violence to Blessing', Vern Neufeld Redekop explains that for humans to feel content, certain basic needs have to be met.

One of the main reasons that work is so important is that there is an opportunity to satisfy a number of these needs.

Security - Our paycheque helps us put food on the table and a roof over our head.

Recognition - We recognize everything from long service achievements to excellence in client service through our local and national recognition programs.

Action - Through innovation programs, suggestion boxes, surveys and our day-to-day work, we can contribute to making a positive difference for others and ourselves.

Connectedness - Whether it's through the team, a committee or your lunch bunch, there is always an opportunity to connect with other people, to feel part of a group.

Meaning - Working in an organization where values are part of the vision and mission contributes to fairness and trust being demonstrated in our interaction with others.

So it is no wonder that, since work contributes to meeting our basic needs, it also carries some weight in how we look at life.

When we feel that a workplace issue threatens one of these needs, feelings of sadness, anger or confusion may result.

More often than not, these feelings have an unsettling impact on our home life - the other 76% of our life.

When this occurs it is important to take some steps to deal with the situation.

What to do...

One step to help cope with an unsettling work situation is to focus on the 76% of your year not spent at work.

First, let's remove from the equation, the amount of time spent sleeping.

If you sleep an average of 7 hours per night, that equals 29% of your year snoozing. (That's more than your time at work!)

You are then left with 47% (100 - 24 (work) - 29 (sleep)) of the year to pursue other interests.

To better deal with work stressors you could look for ways to meet your needs during that 47% of the year you are not at work or sleeping.

Ask yourself,

"Outside of work, how can you...

- **Feel financially secure**
Savings, home equity, investments, sell products of a learned skill (crafts, carpentry)
- **Receive recognition**
Volunteer work, family
- **Take action**
Help your community - neighbourhood watch, school activities, coaching, cleaning up litter, take a course, exercise
- **Feel connected**
Family, friends, church, team sports, hobby groups
- **Feel respected**
Friends, family, coaching, community committees

When you have choices to meet your needs outside of the work environment, you may feel that the work situation is not as threatening.

And if your needs are fulfilled, even partially, outside of the office, the better you will be able to deal with upsetting work situations.

Work options

This is not to say that you should ignore work conflicts that are affecting you. But, focusing on your 'whole' life can sometimes help put things in perspective.

This perspective may then enable you to be less upset about your work situation and be able to approach a resolution quickly and effectively.

Mike Lund

Conflict Resolution Practitioner

P.S.

If we consider that most of us will work for, an average of 45 years (ages 15 - 60), that means that the amount of time spent at work in our entire life (75 years) is 14%!