

Why Do We Work?

While the question as to why we work may seem obvious on the surface—to support ourselves and our loved ones—there are many reasons why we work. Some reasons, such as ambition, a drive to succeed and excel, and the desire to make the world a better place are considered noble reasons to work. They can help determine the career paths we take and how we will ultimately measure our success. But there are some reasons we might be less willing to admit, such as the ability to buy more expensive luxuries, drive better cars, support a particular lifestyle, or even to get away from our chaotic home lives.

Most college students enter their two- or four-year training programs in order to develop skills that will allow them to better compete in the working world. But what are our expectations of the working world? What do we hope to get out of a job besides a regular paycheck? What satisfaction do you expect from a job? What defines a career? What is your idea of “making it”—of achieving success? An early retirement? Fame? Respect? This chapter explores some of the issues connected to why we work.

CRITICAL THINKING

1. What is happening in this cartoon? Can you tell who the people are in the cartoon? What are they discussing? Explain.
2. Do you think this cartoon presents a stereotype of the American work ethic? What issue does it intend to hold up for public scrutiny? Explain.

NEWS ITEM: AMERICANS WORK MORE HOURS FOR LESS PAY THAN EVER BEFORE



Why We Work

Andrew Curry

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CONNECTING TO THE TOPIC

Although most of us work because we have to, we also assume that this work will ultimately improve our lives. But is the pursuit of the American dream becoming just that, a dream? It seems as if Americans are working harder than ever before, with less leisure time. Today, American society is dominated by work. But there was a time when people could have followed a different path, when we could have opted as a nation to actually work *less*. When did the American workforce make the choice to have more stuff over less time? And was it the right choice?

WORDS IN CONTEXT

eccentric: behaving differently from the norm, as an oddball

starkly: bluntly

precarious: lacking in stability

affluent: wealthy

smelter: an iron works

ample: in large number or quantity

apex: highest point

propaganda: methodical and persistent distribution of a message advocating a particular cause or idea

persistence: the refusal to give up

autonomy: the ability to make one's own decisions; independence

Some do it for love. Others do it for money. But most of us do it because we have no other choice.

2 In 1930, W. K. Kellogg made what he thought was a sensible decision, grounded in the best economic, social, and management theories of the time. Workers at his cereal plant in Battle Creek, Michigan, were told to go home two hours early. Every day. For good.

3 The Depression-era move was hailed in *Factory and Industrial Management* magazine as the “biggest piece of industrial news since [Henry] Ford announced his five-dollar-a-day policy.” President Herbert Hoover summoned the eccentric cereal magnate to the White House and said the plan was “very worthwhile.” The belief: Industry and machines would lead to a workers’ paradise where all would have less work, more free time, and yet still produce enough to meet their needs.

4 So what happened? Today, work dominates Americans’ lives as never before, as workers pile on hours at a rate not seen since the Industrial Revolution. Technology has offered increasing productivity and a higher standard of living while bank tellers and typists are replaced by machines. The mismatch between available work and those available to do it continues, as jobs go begging while people beg for jobs. Though Kellogg’s six-hour day lasted until 1985, Battle Creek’s grand industrial experiment has been nearly forgotten. Instead of working less, our hours have stayed steady or risen—and today many more women work so that families can afford the trappings of suburbia. In effect, workers chose the path of consumption over leisure.

5 But as today’s job market shows so starkly, that road is full of potholes. With unemployment at a nine-year high and many workers worried about losing their jobs—or forced to accept cutbacks in pay and benefits—work is hardly the paradise economists once envisioned.

6 Instead, the job market is as precarious today as it was in the early 1980s, when business began a wave of restructurings and layoffs to maintain its competitiveness. Many workers are left feeling insecure, unfulfilled, and under-appreciated. It’s no wonder surveys of today’s workers show a steady decline in job satisfaction. “People are very emotional about work, and they’re very negative about it,” says David Rhodes, a principal at human resource consultants Towers Perrin. “The biggest issue is clearly workload. People are feeling crushed.”

7 The backlash comes after years of people boasting about how hard they work and tying their identities to how indispensable they are. Ringing cell phones, whirring faxes, and ever-present E-mail have blurred the lines between work and home. The job penetrates every aspect of life. Americans don’t exercise, they work out. We manage

our time and work on our relationships. “In reaching the affluent society, we’re working longer and harder than anyone could have imagined,” says Rutgers University historian John Gillis. “The work ethic and identifying ourselves with work and through work is not only alive and well but more present now than at any time in history.”

9 It’s all beginning to take a toll. Fully one third of American workers—who work longer hours than their counterparts in any industrialized country—felt overwhelmed by the amount of work they had to do, according to a 2001 Families and Work Institute survey. “Both men and women wish they were working about 11 hours [a week] less,” says Ellen Galinsky, the institute’s president. “A lot of people believe if they do work less they’ll be seen as less committed, and in a shaky economy no one wants that.”

9 The modern environment would seem alien to pre-industrial laborers. For centuries, the household—from farms to “cottage” craftsmen—was the unit of production. The whole family was part of the enterprise, be it farming, blacksmithing, or baking. “In pre-industrial society, work and family were practically the same thing,” says Gillis.

10 The Industrial Revolution changed all that. Mills and massive iron smelters required ample labor and constant attendance. “The factory took men, women and children out of the workshops and homes and put them under one roof and timed their movements to machines,” writes Sebastian de Grazia in *Of Time, Work and Leisure*. For the first time, work and family were split. Instead of selling what they produced, workers sold their time. With more people leaving farms to move to cities and factories, labor became a commodity, placed on the market like any other.

11 Innovation gave rise to an industrial process based on machinery and mass production. This new age called for a new worker. “The only safeguard of order and discipline in the modern world is a standardized worker with interchangeable parts,” mused one turn-of-the-century writer.

12 Business couldn’t have that, so instead it came up with the science of management. The theories of Frederick Taylor, a Philadelphia factory foreman with deep Puritan roots, led to work being broken down into component parts, with each step timed to coldly quantify jobs that skilled craftsmen had worked a lifetime to learn. Workers resented Taylor and his stopwatch, complaining that his focus on process stripped their jobs of creativity and pride, making them irritable.

Long before anyone knew what “stress” was, Taylor brought it to the workplace—and without sympathy. “I have you for your strength and mechanical ability, and we have other men paid for thinking,” he told workers.

13 The division of work into components that could be measured and easily taught reached its apex in Ford’s River Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan, where the assembly line came of age. “It was this combination of a simplification of tasks . . . with moving assembly that created a manufacturing revolution while at the same time laying waste human potential on a massive scale,” author Richard Donkin writes in *Blood, Sweat and Tears*.

14 To maximize the production lines, businesses needed long hours from their workers. But it was no easy sell. “Convincing people to work 9 to 5 took a tremendous amount of propaganda and discipline,” says the University of Richmond’s Joanne Ciulla, author of *The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work*. Entrepreneurs, religious leaders, and writers like Horatio Alger created whole bodies of literature to glorify the work ethic.

15 The first labor unions were organized in response to the threat of technology, as skilled workers sought to protect their jobs from mechanization. Later, semi- and unskilled workers began to organize as well, agitating successfully for reduced hours, higher wages, and better work conditions. Unions enjoyed great influence in the early 20th century, and at their height in the 1950s, 35 percent of U.S. workers belonged to one.

16 Union persistence and the mechanization of factories gradually made shorter hours more realistic. Between 1830 and 1930, work hours were cut nearly in half, with economist John Maynard Keynes famously predicting in 1930 that by 2030 a 15-hour workweek would be standard. The Great Depression pressed the issue, with job sharing proposed as a serious solution to widespread unemployment. Despite business and religious opposition over worries of an idle populace, the Senate passed a bill that would have mandated a 30-hour week in 1933; it was narrowly defeated in the House.

17 Franklin Delano Roosevelt struck back with a new gospel that lives to this very day: consumption. “The aim . . . is to restore our rich domestic market by raising its vast consuming capacity,” he said. “Our first purpose is to create employment as fast as we can.” And so began the modern work world. “Instead of accepting work’s continuing

decline and imminent fall from its dominant social position, businessmen, economists, advertisers, and politicians preached that there would never be 'enough,'" says University of Iowa Professor Benjamin Hunnicutt, author of *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work*. "The entrepreneur and industry could invent new things for advertising to sell and for people to want and work for indefinitely."

18 The New Deal dumped government money into job creation, in turn encouraging consumption. World War II fueled the fire, and American workers soon found themselves in a "golden age"—40-hour workweeks, plenty of jobs, and plenty to buy. Leisure was the road not taken, a path quickly forgotten in the postwar boom of the 1950s and 1960s.

19 Decades of abundance, however, did not bring satisfaction. "A significant number of Americans are dissatisfied with the quality of their working lives," said the 1973 report "Work in America" from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. "Dull, repetitive, seemingly meaningless tasks, offering little challenge or autonomy, are causing discontent among workers at all occupational levels." Underlying the dissatisfaction was a very gradual change in what the "Protestant work ethic" meant. Always a source of pride, the idea that hard work was a calling from God dated to the Reformation and the teachings of Martin Luther. While work had once been a means to serve God, two centuries of choices and industrialization had turned work into an end in itself, stripped of the spiritual meaning that sustained the Puritans who came ready to tame the wilderness.

20 By the end of the '70s, companies were reaching out to spiritually drained workers by offering more engagement while withdrawing the promise of a job for life, as the American economy faced a stiff challenge from cheaper workers abroad. "Employees were given more control over their work and schedules, and "human relations" consultants and motivational speakers did a booming business. By the 1990s, technology made working from home possible for a growing number of people. Seen as a boon at first, telecommuting and the rapidly proliferating "electronic leash" of cellphones made work inescapable, as employees found themselves on call 24/7. Today, almost half of American workers use computers, cellphones, E-mail, and faxes for work during what is supposed to be non-work time, according to the Families and Work Institute. Home is no longer a refuge but a cozier extension of the office.

21 The shift coincided with a shortage of highly skilled and educated workers, some of whom were induced with such benefits as stock options in exchange for their putting the company first all the time. But some see a different explanation for the rise in the amount of time devoted to work. "Hours have crept up partly as a consequence of the declining power of the trade-union movement," says Cornell University labor historian Clete Daniel. "Many employers find it more economical to require mandatory overtime than hire new workers and pay their benefits." Indeed, the trend has coincided with the steady decline in the percentage of workers represented by unions, as the labor movement failed to keep pace with the increasing rise of white-collar jobs in the economy. Today fewer than 15 percent of American workers belong to unions.

22 In a study of Silicon Valley culture over the past decade, San Jose State University anthropologist Jan English-Lueck found that skills learned on the job were often brought home. Researchers talked to families with mission statements, mothers used conflict-resolution buzzwords with their squabbling kids, and engineers used flowcharts to organize Thanksgiving dinner. Said one participant: "I don't live life; I manage it."

23 In some ways, we have come full circle. "Now we're seeing the return of work to the home in terms of telecommuting," says Gillis. "We may be seeing the return of households where work is the central element again."

24 But there's still the question of fulfillment. In a recent study, human resources consultants Towers Perrin tried to measure workers' emotions about their jobs. More than half of the emotion was negative, with the biggest single factor being workload but also a sense that work doesn't satisfy their deeper needs. "We expect more and more out of our jobs," says Hunnicutt. "We expect to find wonderful people and experiences all around us. What we find is Dilbert." ♦

CONSIDERING THE ISSUES

1. Curry begins his essay with the statement "Some do it for love. Others do it for money. But most of us do it because we have no other choice." Respond to this statement. What motivates you to work? Do you do it for the love of the job? For the money? Because you must? A little of each? Explain.

- In this essay, Curry traces the historical origins of the American workforce and observes that there was a time before World War II when Americans made a choice to have more material things instead of having more leisure time. Which would you rather have? More money or more time? Explain.
- Curry observes that e-mail, voice mail, cell phones, faxes, and computers have created “electronic leashes” that blur the boundaries between home and work. How much do you rely on this equipment? Would your quality of life be less if you did not have access to a cell phone? To e-mail? Do such devices keep us “on” 24/7? Why or why not?

CRAFT AND CONTENT

- Curry quotes several authors and professors who have researched transformations in the American workforce and work ethic. How do these authors, and the quotes he cites, relate to his overall point that American workers have “chosen a path of consumption over leisure”? Explain.
- In paragraph 14, professor Joanne Ciulla observes that it “took a tremendous amount of propaganda” to convince people to work 9 to 5. What is propaganda? What do we associate with the word *propaganda*? What does it imply? Does it seem to fit this context? Why or why not?
- What is the author’s opinion of the state of the American worker? Identify specific statements in this essay that reveal his viewpoint.

CRITICAL THINKING

- Who was Frederick Taylor? How do his theories, and the science of management, relate to the state of the modern worker?
- Participants in a study on Silicon Valley culture noted how they brought work-culture home in the form of “family mission statements,” conflict resolution “buzzwords,” and even flowcharts to organize Thanksgiving gatherings. Is work intruding on family life?

WRITING ABOUT THE ISSUES

- What is your definition of “the American Dream”? How important is money in your version of the dream? What priorities do you give to leisure time? Write an essay in which you compare the points

Curry makes in his essay on the nature of the modern American workforce and your own lifestyle choices, now and in the future.

- At the end of his article, Curry quotes consultants Towers Perrin, who found Americans in general to be deeply dissatisfied with work. Americans expect more and get less out of their jobs. Write an essay about your expectations of job satisfaction now and in the future. Have you ever held a job that you truly loved? Do you expect to find one that provides you with a sense of achievement and satisfaction? How has your experience in the workforce thus far measured up to your expectations? Explain.

Work Is Life

Oliver Libaw

Oliver Libaw is a reporter and writer for ABC News.

CONNECTING TO THE TOPIC

Is work life? For many twenty- and thirty-somethings, work is where they socialize, form friendships, define personal identities, and form support networks. While most sociologists agree that Americans are working more than ever, they disagree as to why. Do we work because we have to, or are we driven by deeper emotional and psychological reasons? Could we be working so hard because we actually *want* to?

WORDS IN CONTEXT

autonomy: the ability to make one’s own decisions; independence

encroach: to push back or take over established boundaries with a gradual, almost imperceptible persistence

¹ In a sense, Phil Chavez is always at work—and that’s the way he likes it.

² “This is 24/7. I get calls at all hours of the night,” says Chavez, a 29-year-old sports agent in Madison, Wisconsin.

³ In representing professional athletes and coaches, he plays the role of friend, counselor, motivator and confidant, and that means being accessible to his clients. The stress level is through the roof, he says.

Major Occupational Groups and Mean Annual Wages

Management: employed: 6,653,480; wage: \$82,790	Protective Service: employed: 2,999,630; wage: \$34,090
Business and Financial Operations: employed: 4,924,210; wage: \$55,550	Food Preparation and Serving: employed: 10,216,620; wage: \$17,290
Computer and Mathematical: employed: 2,827,010; wage: \$63,240	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance: employed: 4,260,380; wage: \$21,060
Architecture and Engineering: employed: 2,376,650; wage: \$59,230	Personal Care and Service: employed: 2,988,590; wage: \$21,380
Life, Physical, and Social Science: employed: 1,113,130; wage: \$53,210	Sales and Related: employed: 13,534,180; wage: \$31,250
Community and Social Services: employed: 1,615,610; wage: \$35,420	Office and Administrative Support: employed: 22,678,010; wage: \$28,260
Legal: employed: 951,510; wage: \$78,910	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry: employed: 461,630; wage: \$20,200
Education, Training, and Library: employed: 7,831,630; wage: \$40,660	Construction and Extraction: employed: 6,085,510; wage: \$36,650
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media: employed: 1,538,150; wage: \$42,620	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair: employed: 5,226,080; wage: \$36,210
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical: employed: 6,173,760; wage: \$55,380	Production: employed: 10,488,450; wage: \$28,710
Healthcare Support: employed: 3,208,770; wage: \$22,750	Transportation and Material Moving: employed: 9,414,920; wage: \$27,600

Occupational Employment and Wages, U.S. Department of Labor; May 2003

4 But, Chavez insists, "I wouldn't want it any other way."

5 Chavez is typical of a growing trend in the workforce, affecting both white and blue-collar employees, says Terry Alan Beehr, a Central Michigan University psychology professor who studies business organization and occupational stress.

6 "A lot of professional jobs are rewarding," he says, as employers emphasize the qualities that drive people to feel invested in their job. Workers naturally drive themselves harder if their position provides them with autonomy, variety, feedback, and shows tangible results, says Beehr.

7 "I do this for personal satisfaction. I really enjoy it," says Adam Lewinson, a 34-year-old project director at Lifetime Television in Los Angeles. "I have a set of personal goals for my life, and my job is part of that." Lewinson's attitude reflects the growing importance of work in our lives.

8 A century ago, work was more commonly seen as a means to an end, says Benjamin Hunnicutt, a sociologist at the University of Iowa. Other aspects of life, like community, family and religion, were considered more important than one's job.

9 "Today, work defines our identity. It gives us direction and purpose," he argues. Work today not only shapes our self-conception, it also provides us with an increasingly important social group. More and more, people build their social network around their colleagues instead of their neighbors or family. "Who do you invite over for dinner—your neighbors or people you work with?" asks Angela Hattery, a Wake Forest University sociologist.

10 "It's an age thing," says Harvard Business School professor Rosa-beth Moss Kanter. "When you're younger and don't have family responsibilities, [work] is also your social life." Some companies have seized on the social aspects of work, and actually encourage interoffice dating, she notes.

11 Kanter and others insist these attitude shifts are the primary reason people are working harder than ever. For the vast majority of white-collar workers putting in long, stressful hours, salary is only a secondary consideration, she argues. Instead people work hard because they get satisfaction from doing their jobs well, and from being a part of a group achievement.

12 Kate Mellema, an administrator at a software company in Washington State, reflects these qualities. "I love coming to work each day; I feel a sense of purpose about our accomplishments," she says.

13 Her views are echoed by Sarah MacMillan, a recent college graduate working for a Boston medical supply company. "I work hard not only because I like it, but because I get treated seriously," she says.

14 For some, however, letting work become the center of life leads eventually to frustration over missed opportunities. "Why are we working so much? It's because we believe that our job will pay off somehow," says Hunnicutt.

15 "We let the workplace invade us," says Bill Gillmore, a computer programmer and engineer in Richardson, Texas. Gillmore says the excitement of working in a new and evolving field spurred him to work long hours throughout his career. Now, however, the heavy demands of his job have taken a toll, he admits. People chasing their career goals "don't notice the workplace encroaching into every aspect of their personal lives."

16 Now, he says, he's "burned out, fed up, and waiting to get laid off." ♦

CONSIDERING THE ISSUES

1. Do you have a full- or a part-time job? If so, how much time do you spend working? Do you work more than you would like to? Less? If you do not currently hold a job, speak to someone who holds the job you expect to have someday and ask them how many hours a week they spend, on average, working. Does their answer surprise you? Why or why not?
2. Think about the things that define you as a person. Describe how these things help to create your personal identity. Does work or career factor into your self-definition? Why or why not?

CRAFT AND CONTENT

3. What is the tone of this article? In what ways does the source of the article reflect our expectations of the tone and style of the piece? Explain.
4. In paragraph 5, Libaw notes that Chavez is a typical example of a growing trend in the workforce, “affecting both *white* and *blue collar* employees.” What do these terms mean? Do the examples of workers profiled in the article reflect both these work types?

CRITICAL THINKING

5. In paragraph 9, professor Benjamin Hunnicutt states that in many ways, “today, work defines our identity.” Do you agree with this statement? In what ways do you think your current or your future career will define your identity? Is this a bad thing? Why or why not?
6. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a professor at Harvard Business School, argues in paragraph 11, “For the vast majority of white-collar workers putting in long, stressful hours, salary is only a secondary consideration.” Do you agree with her statement? Explain.

WRITING ABOUT THE ISSUES

7. In a short essay, compare Libaw’s article that most Americans like to work because it makes them happy, to Curry’s article, which leans more toward the idea that Americans work because “they have to.” Which argument do you agree with more, and why?

8. Imagine that one of your close friends told you that he or she was tired of a job, like Bill Gillmore at the end of this article. The friend is “burned out, fed up, and waiting to get laid off.” Respond to this friend in a letter referring to points made in this article and your own personal work experience. What would you tell your friend to do?

Measuring Success*Renee Loth*

Renee Loth is the editor of the editorial page of the *Boston Globe*, in which this essay first appeared.

CONNECTING TO THE TOPIC

The Declaration of Independence describes our inalienable right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” But what, exactly, is “the pursuit of happiness”? As the document has been interpreted, it often means the right to financial independence and success. Many college students enter the workforce with just such a sense of idealism. Time and experience often test this optimism, forcing many to redefine “the pursuit of happiness” along more realistic and mature lines. What is success? Does our definition change with time? What could college students learn about success from their more experienced friends and family?

WORDS IN CONTEXT

callow: young; lacking in experience and maturity

approbation: expressions of approval or appreciation

mutable: changeable

superfluous: more than is necessary or than what is required

optimist: one who sees the positive side of things, who expects a favorable outcome

fickle: highly changeable or unstable

chagrined: embarrassed

Back when I was a callow college student, I devised a neat grid system for what I hoped would be my life's achievements. I could count my life a good one, I thought, if I could attain both success and happiness. So I set about analyzing the component parts of each: Happiness I subdivided into sections labeled health and love; success, I determined, was composed of wealth and fame.

Once I actually entered the world of work, however, I learned that success is not so easy to define. For one thing, when I made my simple calculation, I never took into account the joy of creation; the approbation of one's peers; the energy of collaboration; or the sheer satisfaction of a job well done. These are real qualities of success that live outside of wealth or fame.

Also, I found that definitions of success are mutable, shifting along with our changing values. If we stick with our chosen fields long enough, we sometimes have an opportunity to meet our heroes, people we thought wildly successful when we were young. A musician friend told me that he spent most of his youth wanting to play like the greats, until he started getting to know some of them. To his surprise, many turned out to be embittered, dulled by drink or boredom, unable to hold together a marriage, or wantonly jealous of others. That's when he realized he wanted to play like himself.

Success is defined differently by different people. For some, it is symbolized by the number of buttons on the office phone. For others, it is having only one button—and a secretary to field the calls. Some think the more nights and weekends they spend at the office, the more successful they must be. For others, success is directly proportional to time off.

And what about those qualities I did include in my handy grid system? Wealth—beyond what is needed to provide for oneself and one's family, with a little left over for airfare to someplace subtropical in January—turned out to be superfluous. And the little experience I had with fame turned out to be downright scary.

Several years ago, I had occasion to appear on a dull but respected national evening television news show. My performance lasted exactly six minutes, and my name flashed only twice. But when I got home from the live broadcast, my answering machine had maxed-out on messages.

I heard from a woman I had last seen in Brownie Scouts. I heard from former boyfriends, conspiracy theorists, and celebrity agents. I even got an obscene phone call—what kind of pervert watches PBS?—from someone who might have been an old friend pulling my leg. At least, I hope so.

For weeks afterward, I received tons of what an optimist might call fan mail. One fellow insisted that if I froze a particular frame of a political campaign ad I had been discussing, I could see the face of Bill Clinton in the American flag. Somebody sent me a chapter of a novel in progress with a main character disturbingly like me. Several people sent me chain letters.

I was relieved when the fickle finger of fame moved on to someone else.

When I was young and romanticizing about success, I liked a particular Joni Mitchell lyric: "My struggle for higher achievement and my search for love don't seem to cease." Ah, but the trouble with struggling and searching is that it keeps us in a permanent state of wanting—always reaching for more. The drive to succeed keeps us focused on the future, to the detriment of life in the moment. And the moment is all we ever really have.

When I look back at my simplistic little value system, I am a bit chagrined at how absolute I thought life was. But I am also happy to report that the achievements that have come my way are the ones that count. After 20 years of supercharged ambition, I have stumbled upon this bit of wisdom. Who needs wealth and fame? Two out of four ain't bad. ♦

CONSIDERING THE ISSUES

1. Loth begins her essay by explaining how, as a college student, she developed a grid system that she felt would define her life's achievements. Following Loth's example, create your own list or grid in which you define what you think your life's achievements might be. How do you define *happiness*? How do you define *success*?
2. What is your definition of wealth? To what extent is it connected to your definition of success? How important is it to your definition of success? Explain.

CRAFT AND CONTENT

3. In paragraph 1, Loth recalls the days when she was "a callow college student." How does this word choice help establish both the tone and the theme of this essay? Explain.
4. In paragraph 10, Loth says in reference to the Joni Mitchell lyric she quotes, "The trouble with struggling and searching is

that it keeps us in a permanent state of wanting.” What does she mean by this statement? How does it relate to the point of this essay overall?

CRITICAL THINKING

5. How does Loth redefine her early notion of success? Why do you think this happened?
6. Loth also changes her definition of fame and abandons it as a goal of success. Why does she do this? Why do you think she wanted fame? Do you? Why or why not? Explain.

WRITING ABOUT THE ISSUES

7. Write your own essay definition of happiness and/or success. Be sure to employ the same strategies Loth does: think of your own experience, the things that make you feel happy and successful, and talk to friends and family for their insights.
8. Since you too might be described as “a callow college student” at this point in your life, create a series of questions that you will then ask older and more experienced friends, family, and acquaintances about happiness and success. Ask all sorts of people your questions, regardless of your own opinions of their happiness or success. Review your notes and write an essay in which you argue what success and happiness really mean based upon your interviews.

The Right Way to Answer the Question: “Mommy, Why Do You Have to Work?”

Sue Shellenbarger

Sue Shellenbarger is an award-winning columnist who writes weekly on issues connected to work and family for the *Wall Street Journal*. She has talked to thousands of people about the “work/life balance” in today’s society. She is the author of *Work & Family: Essays from the “Work and Family” Column of the Wall Street Journal*. This essay appeared in her weekly column on October 29, 2004.

CONNECTING TO THE TOPIC

Most parents dread the question from a pleading youngster, “Why do you *have* to go to work?” Many respond with excuses—they must pay bills, put food on the table, and keep their children clothed. They feel guilty for leaving their child, and even more guilty for preferring to go to work rather than staying home. But what if parents answered children truthfully—that they liked work, or enjoyed helping people, or they liked the challenges they encountered while on the job? Some psychologists say showing enthusiasm for your job is better for children, who may otherwise begin to think of work as “a four-letter word.”

WORDS IN CONTEXT

amid: in the middle of

comparable: similar in nature; alike

intrinsic: essential to the nature of a thing

1 Ilya Welfeld faced a dilemma common among working parents: Leaving for work every day, how could she explain to her crying toddler why she was going away?

2 “‘Honey, we need to buy groceries,’ didn’t really make a lot of sense” to a 2-year-old, says Ms. Welfeld, then a corporate vice president in communications.

3 Parents play a dominant role in shaping children’s lifelong attitudes about work. Yet amid the emotions raised by leaving kids to do our jobs, many moms and dads fumble the ball, mumbling explanations that are a bad fit developmentally or just plain wrong. In fact, parents’ influence on kids’ work ethic plays out not only in words, but in emotions, behavior, and attitudes, in different ways at different stages of a child’s life—and often not in the way we think.

4 Parents generally are failing to convey positive feelings about work to their kids. In a national survey of 605 parents, 69% of mothers say they like their work a lot. But in a comparable sample of 1,023 third- through 12th-graders, only 42% of the kids say their mothers like their jobs a lot, according to the study, reported in “Ask the Children” by Ellen Galinsky of the Families and Work Institute, New York. The same gap existed with fathers; 60% of dads say they like their jobs a lot, but only 41% of children see that positive attitude in their fathers.

5 Some parents fear acting as if they like their jobs will hurt their kids' feelings. Thus, they try to reassure them by acting as if they don't have a choice, saying, as I used to tell my toddler, "Honey, I'm sorry, I have to go to work." Other parents simply feel sad at separating from their children, and focus too much on those feelings.

6 In fact, those emotions speak more loudly to babies and toddlers than any words a parent might utter. "You can explain to a 2- or 3-year-old until you're blue in the face that you need to pay the mortgage," says Jane Healy, a Vail, Colo., educational psychologist and author. "What they're going to pick up is your emotional attitude toward work and what they see it doing to you." A child may feel, "If there's something making my mother miserable, there must be something to be frightened of." Before long, "work" becomes a four-letter word.

7 A better route: Focus on the positive, such as, "I'm really glad I have interesting work to do. And you have interesting work to do, too, when the babysitter comes and you help her put away the groceries," Dr. Healy suggests. Promise to do something together when you return; small children aren't very aware of the passage of time, and looking forward to, say, hearing stories from your workday will help them stay upbeat through the day.

8 Ms. Welfeld saw the power of parental attitude when she quit corporate life last year to start a business in her Bergenfield, N.J., home. In the past, the stress of her corporate job seeped into home life, straining leave-takings from her two children, now three and one. But now, "my attitude toward work is so positive" that she has seen a change in her son: He has relaxed and is more optimistic, and he loves preschool.

9 The next stage, ages five through the elementary-school years, is perhaps most important of all in building a work ethic. Dr. Healy calls this the "age of industry," when children love to accomplish things. This is the time to foster the good feelings that can arise from accomplishment. Celebrate jobs completed, with words or perhaps an outing.

10 Some parents mistakenly assume at this stage they need to take charge of their kids' work habits and direct them in an authoritative way. But studies show parents who support self-reliance—who encourage kids to make their own choices, rather than applying pressure or controls—are more likely to raise hard-working kids.

11 In talking about work with kids of this age, draw positive parallels between your job and their play and school. When Michael Weinberger's 5-year-old daughter asks, "Why do you have to go to work today?" he

replies, "I get to go to work today. It's the same way with you. You get to go to school." He emphasizes that he loves his work as a portfolio manager at a New York hedge fund.

12 Tell your kids about your own intrinsic motivation, Dr. Healy says. For example: "I feel good about what I did today because I helped some people," or "The products I sold today are going to make people comfortable."

13 By middle-school age, kids are ready to understand the values, moral reasoning and financial needs that underlie work choices—why we work and how our job relates to household needs, to other people and to the world at large.

14 At this point, you will begin to see in your kids the results of your teachings. Aaron Dobrinsky, CEO of RoomLinX, Hackensack, N.J., has long told his kids: "You will only excel at what you love. If you hate getting up to go to work every day, you're not going to excel at it." They seem to be listening; his 16-year-old daughter loves working with special-needs children and plans to make it a career; she has started job-shadowing special-ed professionals.

CONSIDERING THE ISSUES

1. Shellenbarger observes that many children think that their parents do not like their jobs very much. Think about how you would answer a child's question, "Why do you have to work?" Would you answer honestly? Would you be concerned that you could hurt your child's feelings by being enthusiastic about going to work? If you are a parent, how have you addressed this question in the past?
2. Recall your own parents' attitudes about work. Did one or both of your parents work outside of the home? Did you think your parents liked their jobs? Have their attitudes influenced your own view of work? Explain.

CRAFT AND CONTENT

3. Shellenbarger refers to several parents and psychologists to support the points she makes in her column. Do some comments seem more credible than others? Explain.
4. Shellenbarger offers advice to parents on how to answer the question "Why do you have to go to work today?" Evaluate her

advice. How do you think a child would respond to the solutions she offers? Explain.

CRITICAL THINKING

- In paragraph 6, psychologist Jane Healy warns that expressing a distaste for work in order to spare children's feelings could actually frighten children and give a negative impression of work. What do you think? Are children growing up fearful of work and its responsibilities? Are there any trends in popular culture that reflect this view? Explain.
- Shellenbarger cites Ms. Welfeld (paragraph 8) as an example of "the power of parental attitude." Is Welfeld's situation compelling support for Shellenbarger's essay? How might a critic react to this particular example? Explain.

WRITING ABOUT THE ISSUES

- Shellenbarger cites a national survey of 605 parents and 1,023 children on their feelings about work. Conduct your own survey. Poll at least 20 parents and 20 to 30 children. Include fathers in your survey. Did children think that one parent was more likely to like his or her job than the other? Discuss your results in a short essay explaining how your data match or counter the survey conducted by Ellen Galinsky.
- In your opinion, are mothers more likely to hear the question expressed in this essay's title than fathers? Why or why not? Are there any social assumptions that come into play? Explain.

There's No Place Like Work

Arlie Russell Hochschild

Arlie Russell Hochschild, a professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley, is the author of *The Second Shift*. This essay has been excerpted from her book *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*.

CONNECTING TO THE TOPIC

Where are you happiest, at work or at home? If you inherited a fortune, would you quit your job? If you had your choice, would you spend more or less time with your family? What do you want your family life to look like in five years? Why do people work in the first place? These are some basic questions that you will soon face once in the job force. These are also questions that Arlie Russell Hochschild put to scores of people in researching the book from which this essay came. According to Hochschild, family life in America is suffering seriously from the demanding work schedules of parents and spouses. In fact, many people find work preferable to home life in the way it nurtures and stimulates.

WORDS IN CONTEXT

- counterintuitive:** the opposite of what common sense would suggest
paradox: a seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true
incentive: something that serves to motivate, either by punishment or by reward
premise: a statement or belief upon which an argument is based
evade: to avoid
talisman: an object believed to confer on its bearer magical powers or supernatural protection
devoid: completely lacking
paternity leave: time off of work granted to fathers of newborn children

- It's 7:40 A.M. when Cassie Bell, 4, arrives at the Spotted Deer Child-Care Center, her hair half-combed, a blanket in one hand, a fudge bar in the other. "I'm late," her mother, Gwen, a sturdy young woman whose short-cropped hair frames a pleasant face, explains to the child-care workers in charge. "Cassie wanted the fudge bar so bad, I gave it to her," she adds apologetically.
- "Pleeese, can't you take me with you?" Cassie pleads.
- "You know I can't take you to work," Gwen replies in a tone that suggests that she has been expecting this request. Cassie's shoulders droop. But she has struck a hard bargain—the morning fudge bar—aware of her mother's anxiety about the long day that lies ahead at the center. As Gwen explains later, she continually feels that she owes Cassie more time than she gives her—she has a "time debt." . . .

4 Gwen used to work a straight eight-hour day. But over the last three years, her workday has gradually stretched to eight and a half or nine hours, not counting the E-mail messages and faxes she answers from home. She complains about her hours to her co-workers and listens to their complaints—but she loves her job. Gwen picks up Cassie at 5:45 and gives her a long hug.

5 At home, Gwen's husband, John, a computer programmer, plays with their daughter while Gwen prepares dinner. To protect the dinner "hour"—8:00–8:30—Gwen checks that the phone machine is on, hears the phone ring during dinner but resists the urge to answer. After Cassie's bath, Gwen and Cassie have "quality time," or "Q.T.," as John affectionately calls it. Half an hour later, at 9:30, Gwen tucks Cassie into bed.

6 There are, in a sense, two Bell households: the rushed family they actually are and the relaxed family they imagine they might be if only they had time. Gwen and John complain that they are in a time bind. What they say they want seems so modest—time to throw a ball, to read to Cassie, to witness the small dramas of her development, not to speak of having a little fun and romance themselves. Yet even these modest wishes seem strangely out of reach. Before going to bed, Gwen has to E-mail messages to her colleagues in preparation for the next day's meeting; John goes to bed early, exhausted—he's out the door by 7 every morning.

7 Nationwide, many working parents are in the same boat. More mothers of small children than ever now work outside the home. . . . Meanwhile, fathers of small children are not cutting back hours of work to help out at home. If anything, they have increased their hours at work. . . . All in all, more women are on the economic train, and for many—men and women alike—that train is going faster. . . .

8 I contacted Bright Horizons,⁶ a company that runs 136 company-based child-care centers associated with corporations, hospitals and Federal agencies in 25 states. Bright Horizons allowed me to add questions to a questionnaire they sent out to 3,000 parents whose children attended the centers. The respondents, mainly middle-class parents in their early 30's, largely confirmed the picture I'd found at Amerco. A third of fathers and a fifth of mothers described themselves as "workaholic," and 1 out of 3 said their partners were.

9 To be sure, some parents have tried to shorten their hours. Twenty-one percent of the nation's women voluntarily work part time, as do

7 percent of men. A number of others make under-the-table arrangements that don't show up on surveys. But while working parents say they need more time at home, the main story of their lives does not center on a struggle to get it. Why? Given the hours parents are working these days, why aren't they taking advantage of an opportunity to reduce their time at work?

10 The most widely held explanation is that working parents cannot afford to work shorter hours. Certainly this is true for many. But if money is the whole explanation, why would it be that at places like Amerco, the best-paid employees—upper-level managers and professionals—were the least interested in part-time work or job sharing, while clerical workers who earned less were more interested?

11 Similarly, if money were the answer, we would expect poorer new mothers to return to work more quickly after giving birth than rich mothers. But among working women nationwide, well-to-do new mothers are not much more likely to stay home after 13 weeks with a new baby than low-income new mothers. . . . A second explanation goes that workers don't dare ask for time off because they are afraid it would make them vulnerable to layoffs. . . . But when I asked Amerco employees whether they worked long hours for fear of getting on a layoff list, virtually everyone said no. . . .

12 Were workers uninformed about the company's family-friendly policies? No. Were rigid middle managers standing in the way of workers using these policies? Sometimes. But when I compared Amerco employees who worked for flexible managers with those who worked for rigid managers, I found that the flexible managers reported only a few more applicants than the rigid ones. The evidence, however counterintuitive, pointed to a paradox: workers at the company I studied weren't protesting the time bind. They were accommodating to it.

13 Why? I did not anticipate the conclusion I found myself coming to: namely, that work has become a form of "home" and home has become "work." The worlds of home and work have not begun to blur, as the conventional wisdom goes, but to reverse places. We are used to thinking that home is where most people feel the most appreciated, the most truly "themselves," the most secure, the most relaxed. We are used to thinking that work is where most people feel like "just a number" or "a cog in a machine." It is where they have to be "on," have to "act," where they are least secure and most harried.

14 But new management techniques so pervasive in corporate life have helped transform the workplace into a more appreciative, personal sort of social world. Meanwhile, at home the divorce rate has risen, and the emotional demands have become more baffling and complex. In addition to teething, tantrums and the normal developments of growing children, the needs of elderly parents are creating more tasks for the modern family—as are the blending, unblending, reblending of new stepparents, stepchildren, exes and former in-laws. . . .

15 Current research suggests that however hectic their lives, women who do paid work feel less depressed, think better of themselves and are more satisfied than women who stay at home. One study reported that women who work outside the home feel more valued at home than housewives do. . . . Many workers feel more confident they could “get the job done” at work than at home. One study found that only 59 percent of workers feel their “performance” in the family is “good or unusually good,” while 86 percent rank their performance on the job this way. . . .

16 Using modern participative management techniques, many companies now train workers to make their own work decisions, and then set before their newly “empowered” employees moral as well as financial incentives. At Amerco, the Total Quality worker is invited to feel recognized for job accomplishments. Amerco regularly strengthens the family-like ties of co-workers by holding “recognition ceremonies” honoring particular workers or self-managed production teams. Amerco employees speak of “belonging to the Amerco family,” and proudly wear their “Total Quality” pins or “High Performance Team” T-shirts, symbols of their loyalty to the company and of its loyalty to them. . . .

17 If Total Quality calls for “re-skilling” the worker in an “enriched” job environment, technological developments have long been de-skilling parents at home. Over the centuries, store-bought goods have replaced homespun cloth, homemade soap and home baked foods. Day care for children, retirement homes for the elderly, even psychotherapy are, in a way, commercial substitutes for jobs that a mother once did at home. Even family-generated entertainment has, to some extent, been replaced by television, video games and the VCR. . . .

18 The one “skill” still required of family members is the hardest one of all—the emotional work of forging, deepening or repairing family relationships. It takes time to develop this skill, and even then things

can go awry. Family ties are complicated. People get hurt. Yet as broken homes become more common—and as the sense of belonging to a geographical community grows less and less secure in an age of mobility—the corporate world has created a sense of “neighborhood,” of “feminine culture,” of family at work. Life at work can be insecure; the company can fire workers. But workers aren’t so secure at home, either. Many employees have been working for Amerco for 20 years but are on their second or third marriages or relationships. The shifting balance between these two “divorce rates” may be the most powerful reason why tired parents flee a world of unresolved quarrels and unwashed laundry for the orderliness, harmony and managed cheer of work. People are getting their “pink slips” at home.

19 Amerco workers have not only turned their offices into “home” and their homes into workplaces; many have also begun to [manage] time at home, where families are succumbing to a cult of efficiency previously associated mainly with the office and factory. Meanwhile, work time, with its ever-longer hours, has become more hospitable to sociability—periods of talking with friends on E-mail, patching up quarrels, gossiping. . . .

20 [Many families] respond to their time bind at home by trying to value and protect “quality time.” A concept unknown to their parents and grandparents, “quality time” has become a powerful symbol of the struggle against the growing pressures at home. It reflects the extent to which modern parents feel the flow of time to be running against them. The premise behind “quality time” is that the time we devote to relationships can somehow be separated from ordinary time. Relationships go on during quantity time, of course, but then we are only passively, not actively, wholeheartedly, specializing in our emotional ties. We aren’t “on.” Quality time at home becomes like an office appointment. You don’t want to be caught “goofing off around the water cooler” when you are “at work.”

21 Quality time holds out the hope that scheduling intense periods of togetherness can compensate for an overall loss of time in such a way that a relationship will suffer no loss of quality. But this is just another way of transferring the cult of efficiency from office to home. . . .

22 Children often protest the pace, the deadlines, and the grand irrationality of “efficient” family life. Children dawdle. They refuse to leave places when it’s time to leave. They insist on leaving places when it’s not time to leave. Surely, this is part of the usual stop-and-go of

childhood itself, but perhaps, too, it is the plea of children for more family time, and more control over what time there is. This only adds to the feeling that life at home has become hard work. . . .

23 [Another] way working parents try to evade the time bind is to develop what I call “potential selves.” The potential selves that I discovered in my Amerco interviews were fantasy creations of time-poor parents who dreamed of living as time millionaires.

24 One man, a gifted 55-year-old engineer in research and development at Amerco, told how he had dreamed of taking his daughters on a camping trip in the Sierra Mountains: “I bought all the gear three years ago when they were 5 and 7, the tent, the sleeping bags, the air mattresses, the backpacks, the ponchos. I got a map of the area. I even got the freeze-dried food. Since then the kids and I have talked about it a lot, and gone over what we’re going to do. They’ve been on me to do it for a long time. I feel bad about it. I keep putting it off, but we’ll do it, I just don’t know when.”

25 Banished to garages and attics of many Amerco workers were expensive electric saws, cameras, skis and musical instruments, all bought with wages it took time to earn. These items were to their owners what Cassie’s fudge bar was to her—a substitute for time, a talisman, a reminder of the potential self.

26 Obviously, not everyone, not even a majority of Americans, is making a home out of work and a workplace out of home. But in the working world, it is a growing reality, and one we need to face. Increasing numbers of women are discovering a great male secret—that work can be an escape from the pressures of home, pressures that the changing nature of work itself are only intensifying. Neither men nor women are going to take up “family friendly” policies, whether corporate or governmental, as long as the current realities of work and home remain as they are. For a substantial number of time-bound parents, the stripped-down home and the neighborhood devoid of community are simply losing out to the pull of the workplace. . . .

27 So where do we go from here? There is surely no going back to the mythical 1950’s family that confined women to the home. Most women don’t wish to return to a full-time role at home—and couldn’t afford it even if they did. But equally troubling is a workaholic culture that strands both men and women outside the home.

28 For a while now, scholars on work-family issues have pointed to Sweden, Norway and Denmark as better models of work-family balance.

Today, for example, almost all Swedish fathers take two paid weeks off from work at the birth of their children, and about half of fathers and most mothers take additional “parental leave” during the child’s first or second year. Research shows that men who take family leave when their children are very young are more likely to be involved with their children as they grow older. When I mentioned this Swedish record of paternity leave to a focus group of American male managers, one of them replied, “Right, we’ve already heard about Sweden.” To this executive, paternity leave was a good idea not for the U.S. today, but for some “potential society” in another place and time.

29 Meanwhile, children are paying the price. In her book “When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting Our Children,” the economist Sylvia Hewlett claims that compared with the previous generation, young people today are more likely to “under-perform at school; commit suicide; need psychiatric help; suffer a severe eating disorder; bear a child out of wedlock; take drugs, be the victim of a violent crime.” But we needn’t dwell on sledgehammer problems like heroin or suicide to realize that children like those at Spotted Deer need more of our time. If other advanced nations with two-job families can give children the time they need, why can’t we? ♦

CONSIDERING THE ISSUES

1. Consider the rhetorical question Hochschild poses at the end of this essay. “If other advanced nations with two-job families can give children the time they need, why can’t we?” What sort of family did you grow up in? Did both of your parents work? Were you raised by only one parent or guardian? Do you feel that your caregivers were able to spend enough time with you? Alternatively, if you are a parent yourself, do you feel that you are able to balance work and family? Explain.
2. In paragraph 13, Hochschild says that “work has become a form of ‘home’ and home has become ‘work.’” What ideas do we typically associate with home? With work? Explain.

CRAFT AND CONTENT

3. Hochschild begins her essay by telling the story of a day in the life of Cassie Bell and her parents. Why does she tell this story? What kinds of issues does each establish?