

Work Daze: Survey says - work is a waste of time

by Bob_Goldman

Listen, if you have work to do, don't read this column. In this seriously scary economy, when our bitten-down fingernails are holding on to our jobs by rapidly fraying threads, you don't want to waste time at work.

Or maybe you do. According to a recent survey from salary.com, a "record number of people" are spending time "on activities that aren't necessarily work related."

This is the fourth annual Wasting Time at Work survey from the website, so you know they aren't wasting time. They're busy 24/7/365, snooping around the workplaces of 2,500 employees "at all job levels."

If you're a productivity person, the results are chilling. A full 73 percent of the survey participants cop to wasting a part of their day, and 22 percent admit to wasting up to two hours per day. Because no one with a brain, as well as a paycheck, likes to admit that they are any degree less than totally essential, I would multiply these responses by a factor of at least three — meaning that 66 percent of all workers are wasting up to six hours a day. That doesn't count the two hours a day we spend complaining about how overworked we are.

Interestingly, the biggest time wasters are workers who have a bachelor's degree or higher. Makes sense to me. What's the point of getting an MBA from Harvard if you can't spend eight hours a day playing Scrabilicious?

Employees over 50 claim to waste the least amount of time — 49 percent report a half-hour or less. Apparently, they don't consider the six trips to the bathroom per hour demanded by their weak bladders as a time sink. Neither do they calculate the time it takes their addled brains to find their way back to their desks when they're done.

The survey also delves into the question of what you do when you don't do nothing. The No. 1 time-wasting activity, at 48 percent, is our friend the Internet. But I'm not sure it's that simple. After all, who among us can really focus on making sales calls when we have no recent, up-to-the-nanosecond information on Jessica Simpson's weight-loss issues? Besides, if they bought us better computers, we wouldn't need to waste so much time hacking through the security firewall to download porn to the company server.

Other top time wasters include: socializing with co-workers, 33 percent; conducting personal business, 30 percent; personal phone calls, 9 percent; and long lunches or breaks, 15 percent. This seems arbitrary to me, and unfair. You need a long lunch to conduct your personal business with your co-workers, and if you can't get it done over lunch, of course, you'll need a follow-up phone call. That's only common sense.

In the survey conducted in the halcyon days of 2007, boredom was the reason most workers gave for their time-wasting efforts. In 2008, the No. 1 reason is job dissatisfaction at 46 percent. A full 24 percent blame their time-wasting tendencies on a lack of deadlines and incentives. The workplace experts at salary.com suggest "employees who don't feel invested in the work they do are less motivated and more likely to waste time."

This is surprising, and I'm sure it will change in the 2009 survey â€” assuming the website will be able to find 2,500 people who are employed. As I'm sure you've noticed, our managers are going out of their way to involve us, and we really should thank them for the mass firings, plant closings and rabid off-shoring efforts. Sure, you feel paranoid, angry and helpless. But, my heavens, you're involved!

Demonstrating the totally admirable refusal to accept responsibility that we've come to expect from our managers and politicians, many workers blamed their time wasting on distractions from other employees. "Fixing someone else's work" was the top-rated excuse at 54 percent, nosing out the activity that the naive suggest is the greatest time-waster of them all â€” office politics at 47 percent.

It is clear that today's savvy workers realize that time spent campaigning in office politics is not a workplace waste, but a job-survival essential. If you think the time you spend buttering up your boss is not a critical part of your job description, don't plan on having that description, or that job, for long.

Trust me, the way things are going, you need to spend every possible hour at work boss-buttering, job-hunting, and resume writing. Look at it that way, bub, and the biggest time waster at your work could be your work.

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