You Cannot Play Catch-Up

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Continually bringing work home or working late to "catch up" only leads to more and more work -- you never actually "catch up." By eliminating factors which inhibit your effectiveness, you can get all your work done in the eight hours allotted each day and leave work on time with peace of mind.

One of the worst time traps that you can fall into is believing that by working a little longer, or by taking work home on the weekend, you can finally "catch up." This fallacy will keep you perpetually chasing the clock for the rest of your career, maybe even the rest of your life.

The Erroneous Notion of Staying Longer

When you take work home, or work a little longer at the office on a perpetual basis, these actions become the norm. Soon, you're taking another thirty or forty pages of reading material home at night as if this is SIMPLY THE WAY IT IS.

On occasion it makes sense to take work home from the office; all career achievers do. During specific campaigns like the launch of a new business, product, or service; when you change jobs; or approaching a significant event, it makes sense to bone up and spend a few extra hours at work.

However, when you consistently work longer hours or take work home from the office you begin to forget what it's like to have a free week night or, eventually, a free weekend. In observing the working styles of some of the most successful people in America--multimillionaires, best-selling authors, high-powered corporate executives, association leaders, top-level government officials, educators--people from all walks of life, I've found that the most successful maintain a healthy balance between their work and home life.

Your key to reducing the time pressure you feel is in learning that you don't need to stay longer. Indeed, to reclaim your day, you cannot stay longer. Your quest is to accomplish what you seek to accomplish within the eight or nine hour workday.

Workdays--Like Careers and Lives--Are Finite

Suppose your workday is 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with an hour for lunch--yielding a total of eight working hours. Study after study shows that most people are only working sixty percent of those eight hours. Even in this downsizing era, most people work a daily average of only four hours and forty-eight minutes on the tasks, responsibilities, and activities that they were hired to perform (Notable exceptions include the self-employed and the fanatically driven). Many factors inhibit your inclination to work a solid eight hours everyday:

1. Too many domestic tasks - it's too easy to think that if you spend a few minutes here and there, taking care of domestic tasks, you can stay on top of it all, save a little money and cruise into work in high gear.

2. Not getting enough sleep - you're probably not getting enough sleep, which leads to lack of efficiency and effectiveness.

3. Over-committing - widely available technology gives managers and businesses the opportunity to get more done--and to expect much more from their employees.

4. Not being sufficiently organized - a desk is not a filing cabinet, and window sills and the corners of your room are not permanent storage locations. You can rule an empire from a desk, if you know how to do it correctly.

5. Lacking effective tools - you can put new technology to work for you, and avoid being overwhelmed by what you acquire.

6. The norm in many offices is over-socializing. Some career professionals have certain rituals that have to occur before they can get to work, like sharpening three pencils, filling their coffee cups, making a personal call, or waiting until the clock on the wall is on the hour!

2,000 Hours a Year Is a Lot

Eight hour workdays, 250 days a year, yields a work year of 2,000 hours. Can you accomplish in 2,000 hours the tasks you were hired for? Yes!

Two thousand hours, 200 hours, eight hours, even one hour, is a great deal of time--if you have the mind-set, the quiet, and the tools.

Take away any of these crucial elements--coming to work exhausted, tackling projects without the necessary resources, getting interrupted, or being mentally unprepared to give your all--and one hour, eight hours, 200 hours, 2,000 hours, or more, won't be sufficient for you to do your work.