

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO LEISURE TIME?

Jeffrey P. Davidson

*Those were the days my friend,
We thought they'd never end.
We'd sing and dance forever and a day.
We'd live the life we choose.
We'd fight and never lose.
Those were the days, oh yes, those were
the days.*

Mary Hopkin

Leisure time has decreased by a staggering 30% during the last decade in our society. Researchers report that complaints "about pressure and lack of time are growing everywhere, among all groups."

The Louis Harris Organization finds that "since 1973 the number of hours worked by Americans has increased by 20%, from 40.6 to 48.8 per week, while the amount of leisure time available to the average person has dropped by 32%."

Jeremy Rifkin, author of *Time Wars* observes that "constant pressure to become ever more ef-

ficient, aided by high technology tools, has enslaved the culture."

A January 2, 1988 front page *New York Times* story entitled, "Most People Feel They Never Have Any Time," discussed the widespread feeling that "there is too much to do." David Meer, Vice President of the Yankelovich Group was quoted: "What we see is a real feeling that there is less true leisure time, less time to wind down."

As part of their annual *Life Style Study*, DDB Needham Harper Worldwide profiles a nationally representative population of 4,000 men and women. This year, 85% of those surveyed agreed with the statement: "I work very hard most of the time." Male and female, married and single, the response rates were nearly the same. Among married females, the rate of responses in agreement with the above statement has increased 18% since 1978.

A *Prevention Magazine* survey on health found that 40% of our adult population, 71,000,000 people, "suffer from stress every day of their lives and find they can sleep no more than six hours a night."

Even among the incarcerated there is a pronounced perception of little available time daily. In a southwestern prison, inmates were allowed to enroll in a brief course that was highly regarded among them. No one signed up. This was not a case of apathy or protest. A survey was taken to determine why no one enrolled, when it was acknowledged among the inmates that the course was worthwhile. The predominate answer was that even they had no time.

You do not need to read research findings. You know and feel that you are time-pressed. Time has become the most important currency in life.

Between her job, her friends, maintaining her apartment, and pursuing her interests, Anna, 55 and never married, easily consumes all 168 hours, each week. Jerry is married and a father of two children. He is self-employed and finds he must budget every minute of his day.

Enemies of Leisure Time

- Overcommitting
- Working in front of the clock
- Having an unrealistic time frame
- Working under pressure
- Working without the right equipment
- Maintaining low self-esteem (what I do is unimportant—so I'd better work harder)
- Comparing yourself to others
- Using outmoded approaches
- Retaining what does not fit
- Following the unchallenged ritual
- Overspending
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Watching television
- Not living in the moment, preoccupation
- Increasing information intake
- Having too many choices
- Lacking focus
- Striving
- Struggling for inner satisfaction
- Receiving poor advice
- Being greedy



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Harmful: A Lack of Transitions

When the transitions between time-pressed activity and leisure activity are abrupt, the quality of leisure time suffers. In turn this impacts the quality of our working time. The cycle can get very vicious. Strains of the work week tend to make us place great emphasis on our weekends. We count on them for relaxation and recreation. The pressure is enormous, and yields an inability to relax, and heightens the perception of quickly passing time.

The more guardedly you revere your leisure time, the more conscious you are of how little there seems to be.

Gary arranges to see his girlfriend from 7:30 to 8:45 on Tuesday. From 9:00 to 11:00 he must get back to work on his project and then be in bed by 11:15 p.m. The perception of never having enough time pervades all aspects of being, diminishes happiness, and eliminates joie de vivre.

Institution Impediments

How does the corporation contribute to sharp decreases in leisure time? Research indicates that after all is said and done the workplace is slow to change. Worldwide competition has forced corporations to streamline operations, tighten belts, and in many cases to down-size.

Commonplace poor working conditions exacerbate time-pressure on the job, which in turn impacts time away from the job:

- Corporate sponsored workaholicism—found to be at epidemic levels in several studies.
- Lack of mentoring—formally or informally established mentor/protege relationships are rare. Guidance saves time.
- Band-aid fixes—i.e., not purchasing or properly maintaining equipment, which leads to inefficiencies and major breakdowns.
- Working under unnecessary pressure—constantly time-pressed managers do less planning while requiring of others

that more tasks be completed ASAP. Workers constantly under pressure bring it home with them.

- Working on site—commuting to and from work each day is a serious time drain; most work can be done at home.
- Inadequate or nonexistent day care—the shame of otherwise “modern” corporations.

Woe be the Career Climber

Career climbers often seek to gain more leisure time later by working harder now. Their frequent lament is: “If I had more time, I could make more money, thus gaining more leisure time. It’s all interconnected.”

Meanwhile, career professionals today face outrageous competition with fewer advancement opportunities. 12,000,000 professionals will be squeezed from the corporate ranks within five years and will not be reabsorbed by other corporations. The advent of computers has stripped away the need for layers of middle management.

Job changing has become a career nightmare. For positions paying \$25,000 or more, an average of five months is required to land a new job. The job changing ordeal chains many people to the present position complete with long commute and lack of time-saving amenities.

Entrepreneurs work longer and harder—with less leisure time and for most, with significant stress. The entrepreneurial life has been heralded, misconstrued, and sensationalized. It is a time consumer of the highest order.

Leisure Time and Changes in Family Structure

Demographer Martha Farnsworth Ritchie says that “not too long ago, the media trumpeted a return to the traditional family. The media jumped the gun.”

“What we are about to see is smaller, more diverse households and families created by the new three D’s of life style—delayed marriage, deferred childbirth, and divorced couples,” says Ritchie.

The number of families headed by a single adult, usually female, is growing annually. This places inordinate economic and time-related strains on working individuals with children. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that the after-tax income of the average female-headed household declined during the period of 1980 to 1985.

Families with both parents working have more income and spend more, but have less time. The net gain in the number of working mothers has greatly risen within one decade, even as a significant number of working mothers have decided to exit the workplace. And, on average, homeowners spent 17% of annual income on mortgage payments in 1980. In 1987, that figure was 24%.

No More Hangin’ Out

Many fathers’ weekend time with their children is scheduled, if it exists at all. Linda W’s kids say, “Dad never hangs out with us any more.”

Pressed and frazzled by the onslaught of responsibilities, more couples are finding it exhausting to have to “be” with one another—converse, empathize, respond. An article in *Working Woman* discussed how we use routine activities during our time off to avoid having to actually be with one another. “. . . some couples use sex to keep from being together in other ways.” The reticence to be with one another is a yet-to-be-recognized fallout of a time-pressured existence.

Commodities

When leisure time, as time in general, becomes a commodity, we often greet it with apprehension, misgivings. The growing concern over how we use or leisure time and what we are supposed to “get” from it is contributing to guilt and anxiety. A cultural inability to relax dogs us and negates many benefits leisure traditionally has provided.

Fight for your leisure time, and enjoy it. You deserve it. ■