

The best of *Bon Journal*

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Volume 1 Issue 1: Work like you don't need the money

It's been said that a person on average changes career five times during his/her lifetime. One management professor advises that you can change the industry and the function but not at the same time. The whole world of work is changing, towards more flexibility.

Work-related stress

It's been reported that workers in the lower rungs of the company ladder suffer the most stress. To put it correctly, people who face high time pressures (such as deadlines), have low autonomy (not able to determine what they want to do), and perform repetitive (predictable and boring) tasks are most susceptible.

Stress accumulates and manifests itself in health problems, such as ulcers and high blood pressure.

Most people don't recognise the signs of stress when they experience it. People tend to eat less well, sleep less well, and get irritated easily. We have to forgive our stressed out colleagues for cutting us off, not looking at us when we're talking to them, looking at the screen and typing but pretending to listen, and all such disrespectful behaviour.

Chill out or burn out

In Europe, it's normal to get five to six weeks of vacation. With high income taxes, it makes more sense to get time off than more pay. Talking about your last holiday or your next holiday is as common as talking about the weather.

In the US, it's taboo to talk about holidays. First of all, you don't get many. Secondly, it's perceived as showing off. It's also harder to take big chunks of leave.

The problem with taking any amount of time off is that you have more to catch up with when you come back. News doesn't stop when you're away.

Some people are afraid that if they take too long a vacation, they might not have a job when they return.

Business and friendship

Do you work with people you like (such as your friends) or do you become friends with people you work with?

It's much easier to work with people you like (than with people you don't like) as you share the same understanding and you accept each other. If you don't like the people you work with, you should try to work with those you get on with - or learn to like them.

What happens if you do business with your friends?

Business is about the balance sheet of asset and liability and the profit/loss statement of income and costs. Everything balances at the end of the day. It's all numbers after all.

Friendship, on the other hand, is about give and take. It is in the eye of the beholder. What you perceive as important may not be so to the other. What you perceive as costly to you - may not be so. So you give and take, give and take..... at different times and in different amounts. It does not balance. There should not be a balance sheet. Both should win - otherwise there is no point in a friendship. Resentment builds.

So what happens when you do business with your friends? How do you balance an unbalanceable sheet?

Doing your CV

It takes time to do a CV. It's a time of self scrutiny and critique. Can you put your life into a page? Clearly not. But it should be enough to get someone to want to talk to you. A CV is only an indicator. A good CV doesn't get thrown away. So the objective should not be to tell your life story, but to get an interview.

There is a standard format for the country in which the CV is being sent. So if you're sending it to the US, it should be familiar to people in the US - where it's called a "resume"

1. Less is more. Don't put insignificant detail that don't relate to what you're seeking.
2. Spelling or grammar errors are not allowed. That's a sign of - carelessness, a lack of respect for the person receiving the CV.
3. Continuity is good. every gap (in time) must have a reason
4. Name dropping is good. It's good to have famous people or well-known companies if you've worked for or studied under them.
5. Be specific, wherever possible.
6. Be consistent otherwise you will raise suspicion and risk losing your credibility.
7. Make sure you're using the right word: a degree refers to university-level education, such as Bachelor, Master, Doctorate. A diploma is not the same as a degree.
8. Try to limit it to one page.

Doing everything but

Keeping busy, feeling like you're being productive, sometimes we fall into a habit of doing everything but the one thing that we're supposed to do.

In time management jargon, the term for this is "priority inversion." You do the least important things first, and the most important and urgent thing last.

Sometimes it's easier to do the trivial things, like cleaning up your

desk, answering emails, than tackling a big task like writing an article. But if you keep procrastinating, the task becomes bigger, more urgent, and more daunting.

Sometimes you don't realise that you are putting it off. You don't know what your priorities are. You might not even know what you're supposed to do. So you try to do everything that comes to your mind.

Think before you do. And do it with thought.

Best way to communicate

Nowadays we can communicate in so many different ways, whether one-to-one, many-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to many:

- face to face
- email
- telephone call
- fax
- written memo, letter, scrap of paper
- chat room
- discussion forum
- video conferencing
- tele-conferencing
- instant messenger, "sametime"

The appropriateness and effectiveness of these communication methods depend on the person and the situation. Instant messenger is better than email or phone call for those who like to multi-task and type faster than they speak. On the other hand, face to face meetings adds the additional dimension of body language.

It takes awhile before people figure out what is best for certain people. Even with emails, there are optimal lengths. To a busy manager, short emails (one sentence or fragments) are better than long ones. When you have to let five people know about some thing that they all can action on, you may run into a decision problem: do you send a) the same

email to all five people, b) just one and cc the others, c) blind copy all of them, or d) send the same email five times? For a) each person may assume that the others are acting on it and thus not respond. For b) the one person may be unavailable or miss the email. Thus no response. It seems that c) and d) are the most effective.

Second passions

Work as a means to an end. These are the people who do not live to work. Their hobbies and pastimes are easily work in their own right, except their dayjobs pay more. Are they the ones that have compromised themselves to work to live?

Play ethic

Everyone knows about the "work ethic." Is that why many of us are stressed-out, debt-ridden, overworked, and exhausted? We feel guilty going to work late and leaving early, so we engage in all sorts of mindless activity to compensate. Like looking busy, pushing paper, sending memos, ...

Why believe in work, when work doesn't believe in you?

Sunday's (22 Oct 2000) Observer Magazine (LIFE) introduced a new concept: "play ethic." The buzz words are flexibility, creativity, and self-improvement. The concept of work changes.

The play ethic says "I play, therefore I am." To quote the Observer, it's about having the confidence to be spontaneous, creative, and empathetic across every area of your life - in relationships, in the community, in your cultural life, as well as paid employment. It's about placing yourself, your passions and enthusiasms at the centre of your world.

Sartre said "play is what you do when you feel at your most free and your most voluntary."

Who will do it?

The following blurb is from an officer at the job centre. It illustrates what it's like working in a company for too long. It could equally describe what it is like sharing a big house.

There are four people named **everybody**, **somebody**, **anybody**, and **nobody**.

Everybody was sure that **somebody** would do it.

Anybody could have done it but **nobody** did.

Somebody got angry about that because it was **everybody**'s job.

Everybody thought that **anybody** could do it, but **nobody** realised that **everybody** wouldn't do it.

So it ended up that **everybody** blamed **somebody** when **nobody** did what **anybody** could have done.

This reflects the tragedy of the commons - or what economists call the public good or the public bad.



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Editor's note:

Each year I ask myself if I'm doing what I want to do. My ex-colleagues in the US job-hop to increase their salaries. My ex-colleagues in London are too busy to notice. These are extracts from my online journal at analyticalQ's platform for self-expression.

Leaving your job is not a simple case of resigning, getting fired, accepting a voluntary separation package, or being made redundant. The way you leave could determine whether you get any compensation at all. ---- extracted from "Resignation and redundancy: understanding your legal rights" by Anne Ku, 19 September 2002, Issue 121 Freepint Internet Newsletter at <http://www.freepint.com/issues/190902.htm#feature>

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