

This Page Intentionally Left Blank –
Just Like the Paychecks of the Workers

By Robert S. Swiatek

This book is dedicated to those who have to choose between being homeless or being hungry while defrocked CEOs are stuck with a severance pay of a mere seven figures.

Introduction

Not long ago, *24/7* actually became a word. Don't blame me; it certainly wasn't my idea. I think it's time to say Sayonara to it, since it just hasn't worked and probably should more realistically be described as *el toro crappo*. How about replacing it with *30/15*? The *30* represents the number of hours in the new workweek and the *15* stands for the number of dollars in the new minimum wage.

The sixty-hour week at the factory has only led to stress, heart attacks, stomach illnesses and other health problems as well as not really getting the job done. It really doesn't matter what kind of work you do, no one can be productive putting in that many hours a week. People who lived a century ago would remark that sixty is nothing as they were forced to endure eighty-hour stints. That boils down to sixteen hours a day for a five-day week or in excess of eleven hours for working every day of the week ending in a "y." I cannot imagine how they put up with those ludicrous hours. That is one of the reasons why our grandparents and great grandparents had such short life spans.

In *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time*, Paul Rogat Loeb, states, "We should be able to earn a living wage without sacrificing our psychological, spiritual and sometimes even physical well-being by giving over our entire lives to our jobs." Ro Donahue – my supervisor on the last contract I had – was right on the money when she said that family and home life came first and then work followed in importance.

Realistically, how much work do you think employers get out of those who are on the job for a "mere" forty hours a week? Even that number of hours is problematical and causes burnout. Since no one is physically capable of being truly productive for so many hours in a week – I'll get to why later – why does management still insist on the practice? With technology, shouldn't the length of the workweek have

decreased over the years, rather than skyrocketed to such heights? I witnessed the shortening of those hours in my experiences on the farm, in the factory and in the office and this decrease seemed typical for a while. Unfortunately, once the minimum of thirty-five hours was attained, it didn't stay there for long but instead started climbing back up and got to where it is today, which is over forty hours a week, even though the contract said forty.

The good news is that the Senate passed a bill for a thirty-hour workweek and the House was all set to do the same. The bad news is that Roosevelt felt it wasn't a good idea. That failure was in 1933, so it's time to pass this legislation, even if it takes three quarters of a century to do it. At the same time raise the hourly pay to fifteen dollars an hour, since the current one is minimal in every sense of the word, and it shouldn't come in increments of a dime each year for a hundred years. There has not been a boost in the minimum wage in nine years – it hasn't been raised since 1997. In that same period, the Congress has approved its own pay increases eight times. For their efforts over that period, I feel most of them should surrender at least part of their salaries.

Being the richest nation on earth, there should be no problem finding the dough to make **30/15** a reality. There's plenty of cash available if companies can accept corporate welfare and give incompetent CEOs millions of dollars and say, "good-bye and don't come back." These departing, deficient dictators should be handed a pen as a souvenir and should be sued for back pay. Amazingly, the **30/15** concept can actually increase company profits, which those in management with butter beans for brains obviously haven't figured out. Arguments by posturing politicians or money minded moguls of the business world against this progressive thought are nothing more than spin, which should be relegated to *Wheel of Fortune*.

Obviously, much elaboration is needed and *This Page Intentionally Left Blank – Just Like the Paychecks of the Workers* will try to do that. It is a book about work, which evolved into social justice concerns of 30/15. In 2003, I had my third book published, *Tick Tock, Don't Stop: A Manual for Workaholics*, which got some good reviews. I wrote it because I saw too many people struggling to stay ahead in the rat race. Some labored from dawn to dusk, even though they retired some time ago. Others stayed on the job while they could have easily afforded to retire. Unfortunately, the book described hasn't sold enough copies because things in the business world have only deteriorated and people are still struggling, no matter how they try to make a living. The long workweek and the small paychecks have a great deal to do with that.

Today the gap in compensation between upper management and those who actually produce the goods – whether it is a product or a service – is higher than it has ever been. On the average, according to what I read, those at the top receive 411 times the salary of those in the work force – that multiplier is probably too low. The employees' plight is so desperate that I am convinced that slavery was never abolished, as downsizing and outsourcing seem to confirm.

Laborers in the Third World, who endure endless hours today in the sweat shops creating goods that sell for hundreds of dollars in the United States while they are paid under a dollar an hour, are no better off than those who suffered in the heat on the plantations for too many years before the Civil War restored some of their dignity. You can be unemployed, underemployed or over employed and underpaid – working two or more jobs to pay for food and shelter. You could have a job but no home. Having to decide between being homeless or without food is not a choice anyone in America or anywhere else should have to make.

People in corporate America are better off than workers who have to figure a way to make ends meet on anywhere from \$5 to \$9 an hour, but their lives are no picnics either. Many don't have the luxury of joining a labor union when they really need one because those organizations are becoming as rare as slide rules and balanced budgets. Management won't allow workers to even talk to the unions without being booted out the door.

Given the vast wealth of our nation, there is no reason for there to be poverty, homelessness, unemployed people, underemployed people or people working sixty hours a week and still not making ends meet. I have to ask these questions of the filthy rich, "How much money can you spend?" and "Have you no sense of decency or compassion?" Marian Wright Edelman remarks, "We are going to have to develop a concept of enough at the top and at the bottom, so that the necessities of the many are not sacrificed for the luxuries of the few."

Our society cannot exist and prosper under the conditions that we see today. This effort will get more into social justice issues, for which the corporations and politicians seem not to care. I hope this book gives you a few more laughs than *Tick Tock, Don't Stop* provided. I also hope that more people will get a chance to read it, although it's not too late to pick up a copy of the book that was published in 2003. By buying either book, you may not be able to retire, but you should be able to do so sooner and you won't become a millionaire, but you should have a richer life.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank is written to entice readers into action about the main thrust of the book. A replacement of *24/7* with *30/15* will go a long way to making our lives better. I add other thoughts that are tied in to the workweek and minimum wage, such as how to retire sooner. I talked to a friend of mine who said she was having a hard time adjusting to being retired. I told her that she probably loved her

work too much and if she had hated it, she wouldn't have had such a difficult time away from it. I hope she gets over this feeling, as this should be a better time for her. I talk to a lot of people after they retire that feel so good about the change that they wish they had left the work force sooner.

There are other issues I discuss related to *30/15* such as slavery, an alternative to hard work without laziness, married priests, where the money went, moving garage sales, why we despise work and why the hours in the week have gotten longer rather than shorter, especially with all those technological advances. This book also has thoughts on immigration, the idea of thresholds, artists as well as education and its impacts on work and some changes that we need in institutions of learning.

The book argues for a return of Sunday as a day of rest – I'm all for that and do my best to keep my PC (Pain in the Crotch) turned off on that day. I point out conclusive cases of where work can kill you and tell of speed bumps and potholes in the road, some of which you may not have been aware. I talk about materialism, health care, unnecessary work, which I especially despise, and offer some of my adventures and a few other topics to entertain as well as enlighten you.

The book wouldn't be complete without some suggestions to help us change the climate in corporape (many workers feel violated) America to make our lives better, including an excel spreadsheet so you can see how much cash is flowing out your wallet. There are recommendations for government, unions, the press and corporations but I also add a few ideas for people as individuals. As bad as things are, there is the hope that changes can be made to improve the profits of the companies as well as the lives of the working class so that we can retire sooner and also have a few years to enjoy that time.

As far as the main title goes, those first five words are familiar to all of us. I first encountered them at Nestle Foods,

when I was perusing computer manuals – I was having difficulty sleeping. We can probably thank IBM for the start of my book title, but if you’ve run into these words somewhere, you’ll realize that you can’t hand over the sheet of paper with those five words to someone who wants to borrow something to write on. It really isn’t blank, but apparently two things are: the brain of the person who came up with the idea as well as the supervisor who sanctioned these five words. If there is nothing on a page, I think people can figure that out and it doesn’t need explaining. Did the corporation actually pay these “innovators?” I hope not.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank has nothing to do with scandals in the Nation’s Capital during 2006, although the book, of necessity, isn’t apolitical. Those first five words of the title refer to the paychecks of the workers as well as the feelings of the average Joe and Joan on Saturday because the workweek is too long and the wages too minimal. It refers to the emptiness of the factories and businesses that have had jobs shipped to India and China. It represents the look of those in hospitals who have worked too many hours for too little pay. These words stand for the unnecessary work that people do while meaningful endeavors are put aside, never to be initiated.

The subtitle I originally thought about was, *30/15 not 24/7*, which would have been fine, since that is certainly a theme here. This work is a plea for a drastic change to eradicate *24/7* from the dictionary as well as from our lives, once and for all time. The *30/15* is a much better idea that workers in the United States can live with.

I need to give a few other words of warning: some of the words you see in this book you may not find in any dictionary. One of the advantages of being a writer is the privilege of using clichés, alliteration and also the option of ending sentences in prepositions. This you could never get away with in English class. I can also use combinations of letters that actually aren’t

real words. This is done for a few laughs, which are definitely needed at a time when there is so much despair in the working environment. Despite that, all is not hopeless as we have the ability to come with up solutions for just about any problem.

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