

hard sciences because we confront an unnatural universe that requires judgment and evaluation,” he told his colleagues in 1992. “The modern state has

made us a dismal science, and we have made it worse by the scientific practice of removing ourselves two or three levels away from sensory experience.” Lowi

calls for a return to Wilsonian principles and to greater engagement with the real world of politics, but his is at least as lonely a voice as Wilson’s was in 1903.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

300,000 Miles and Proud of It

THE SOURCE: “Extreme Jobs: The Dangerous Allure of the 70-Hour Workweek” by Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Carolyn Buck Luce, in *Harvard Business Review*, Dec. 2006.

THE WORLD OF WORK DOESN’T just appear to be more time consuming and demanding than it did only five years ago. It is. At the top of the nation’s job hierarchy, the “extreme job” is becoming ever more so. Nearly half of people with extreme jobs say they are working an average of 17 more hours per week than they did as recently as 2001, write Sylvia Ann Hewlett, president of the Center for Work-Life Policy, a New York nonprofit, and Carolyn Buck Luce, chair of the Hidden Brain Drain Task Force.

Extreme jobs are those that are highly paid—salaries are in the top six percent of all wage earners—and require more than 60 hours of work a week. Tending toward unpredictability, they often require 24/7 availability and extensive travel. About 21 percent of the nation’s most highly paid

professionals describe their positions as extreme, according to a 2006 survey by the Center for Work-Life Policy. Workers with extreme jobs are frequently expected to handle mentoring and recruiting, to attend after-hours



“I just want to go home, crawl into bed, and do some more work.”

events, and to juggle an inordinate scope of responsibility that amounts to more than one position. Think of the creative director of a large entertainment company, juggling new technologies, new products, and new markets on new continents.

The rise in the demands of top professional jobs grows out of “sweeping changes in the global eco-

nomie environment,” the authors write. Mergers and flattened hierarchies have shrunk the pool of such positions in some areas—more than three percent of all corporate officer positions in the *Fortune* 500 have disappeared within the past 10 years—even as new female and minority candidates contend for the remaining slots. As competitive pressures throughout the economy make extreme jobs seem more necessary, other changes in society are making them more attractive. As in the world of extreme sports,

where the winners perform the most daring, demanding, and gratuitous feats, so professionals wear their over-the-top work commitments on their sleeves, bragging about flying 300,000 miles a year.

Technology facilitates extreme work. Cell phones, PDAs, and the Web make staying in constant touch possible, hence mandatory.

As more hours are spent at the office, households and families are starved of time, and they become progressively less appealing. Home becomes the source of stress and guilt, while work becomes the place where successful professionals go to get strokes, admiration, and respect, the authors say.

Even so, “long workweeks cannot

simply be chalked up to the crushing effects of a heartless and unchecked capitalist system.” Many extreme professionals find their work enormously alluring. Their intensity and investment may serve companies well in the short run but will pose risks over time. Employees can burn out, undermine their health, and weaken family ties.

The extreme work model threatens to cull real talent, particularly female talent, that otherwise could have reached the top. Women don’t shirk the responsibility of extreme work, but the majority—especially women who are mothers—are simply not matching the hours logged by their male colleagues, the authors write. Companies seeking more gender diversity—and perhaps greater lifestyle balance—in their upper ranks should look carefully at the work behavior they are rewarding. Their pool of top talent will shrink dramatically if jobs go from being exhilarating to merely exhausting.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

No Rest for the Wicked

THE SOURCE: “A Century of Work and Leisure” by Valerie A. Ramey and Neville Francis, as summarized in *The NBER Digest*, Feb. 2007.

THE BRITISH ECONOMIST JOHN Maynard Keynes predicted in 1930 that the central problem of humanity in the future would be how to spend its copious leisure time in a meaningful way. He saw productivity increasing so dramatically that companies would have

True leisure time available to Americans remains almost the same as it was in 1900.

to dole out work sparingly to have enough to go around. Although Keynes was correct about productivity and, to some extent, the shrinkage of the workweek, he was out to lunch on leisure.

Studies show that Americans work hundreds of hours less per year than they did a century ago, potentially opening up vast new opportunities for leisure activities. But measurements of work and leisure depend on who and what is counted. Unlike earlier researchers, Valerie A. Ramey and Neville Francis, of the University of California, San Diego, and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, respectively, include everybody, young and old, in their study of leisure time, because the definition of “working age” has changed so much over the past 100 years. And they define leisure differently as well, toting up only activities that people enjoy performing, not taking the car to be inspected or sending off payments to the utility company.

True leisure time available to Americans, they write, remains almost the same per capita as it was in 1900. The number of paid on-the-job hours has declined, to be sure. What has expanded most is the amount of time spent in education. High school is now required, and more than half of high school graduates enroll in college. The authors conclude that about 70 per-

cent of the decline in hours worked has been offset by an increase in hours spent in school (which are counted as work).

Moreover, despite the proliferation of labor-saving appliances, to say nothing of the relatively recent arrival of takeout food, “home production” work—tasks such as cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, commuting, and yard work—grew over the century. It increased partly because standards rose. In 1913, a home economist observed that “if one is poor it follows as a matter of course that one is dirty.” As America got wealthier, expectations of cleanliness went up, and laundry, dishwashing, and housecleaning took more time. As breadwinners got better jobs, families bought more food and acquired fancier tastes, which required more and higher-quality cooking. As families had fewer children, more time and effort had to be put into the nurture of each one.

The researchers extracted their definition of leisure from a survey rating enjoyment of various activities. The activities with the highest scores were counted as leisure, and among them were sex, sports, playing with the kids, movies, and sleep. The losers on the enjoyment scale were counted as home production work—commuting, babysitting, home repair, gardening, and laundry.

The authors acknowledge a “degree of imprecision” in their estimates, but they believe that, overall, they have accurately captured the direction of change in true leisure time between 1900 and 2000: It went nowhere.