

The question 'Did you have a good day at work?' is another way of asking 'Was it productive?' Time spent at work in exchange for money creates the expectation of things done and achieved, and efficiently to boot. A good employee is one who gives more to the company than required, whose productivity is worth his weight in gold. You know the drill: time is money, exceed all expectations, impress the right people with your skills etc. Think about costs per hour, target quotas and service levels to be met. Throw in some sweeteners with bonuses (and overtime if you're lucky), but also remember that you are expendable and easily replaced in any jobs climate. Companies spend a lot of managerial time and effort stipulating you must be productively busy, or appear to be productive, at all times. They're careful to calculate the value of lost productivity due to private web surfing, emailing and social networking, or listen to scary reports by consultants who specialize in productive propaganda. But the resultant situation is this: our general idea of real productivity has been entirely usurped by these raw corporate economics of work.

Consider this situation: when a person becomes suddenly unemployed, downshifted or made redundant, his sense of productivity often stays at the level of expectation as was when regularly employed. And for quite some time. If the unemployed day isn't full of achievement and tasks fulfilled (applications sent, networks built & maintained, phone calls and queries made), and well-managed for time, then the day hasn't been productive at all. There's no satisfactory sense of rest being earned; a latent sense of guilt takes hold, a niggling sense of personal failure. It's the old ideas and expectations talking. I don't think depression sets in faster anywhere else than it does with unemployed people.

This is why I'm slightly suspicious of people who live *only* for work, or feel unconsciously trapped by their careers somehow: they let their jobs determine their personal values and sense of satisfaction. The cubicle-outlook has become their private cubicular outlook.

For which the only prescription is a healthy dose of self-indulged laziness. A complete spell of nothing and no expectation. A certain but significant amount of boredom, faffing about in the shed, walks in the park, beers in the afternoon, swims in the sea. To clear the head and reset the personal sense of productivity. To approach and stretch that moment usually reached on the last days of a holiday, when you actually start getting used to the idea of doing very little— to push through and make that the norm. It's a key moment you don't want to wait until retirement to find you can't change any more — that's the worst time and place to discover you're a work-shaped husk of a human. We are not husks, we are so only compared to the full artful life; we can easily unlearn all that work and productivity guff. You might not be earning, but you might also be rescuing your brain.

The key is taking control of time again, and being creative with how you spend your time. Clearing the head is productive. *Not* thinking sometimes is productive. Walking for an hour is productive. Talking to varied people and changing your perspective is productive. Watching your breathing, or just being gentle with your movements can be very productive. It's the expectation of immediate benefits and returns and byproducts that mucks us up.

The virtue of Slow is this: take control of your time, take control of your mind, and then create your own sense of expectation and fulfillment. The results might be quietly surprising. Beware of

any externally-imposed sense of productivity or duty to things that don't resonate on a personal level — work has to match up with your personality in some way. If your mind is an instrument, then you'd be careful of what kind of music (and for whom) you'd play it. Cultivate and sculpt and expand your own definition of living, your own life: that's the only art. Because that's where true productivity begins.