

1. What do you see in the picture?
- 2 How do you think ‘work’ has changed last 20 years? In what ways do you think it is the same?
3. The noun ‘grind’ in the title of the text is used to mean ‘something that is hard work, tiring and boring’. What do you think the whole title means?

WORK

The daily grind we just can’t do without

Work may sometimes seem like hell, but when we haven’t got it, we miss it. We miss it, we want it and perhaps we even need it. Everyone wants to be valued and a salary is proof that we matter. Not any job will do, however. Housework and voluntary work tend to be seen as non-jobs. In our work-centred culture, a ‘proper job’ means paid employment. Being paid for a job is better for our self-esteem. Of course, we would also prefer work to be useful and interesting, as well as paid. But you don’t have to enjoy your job to get psychological benefits from it. According to some experts, achieving unenjoyable tasks during our work actually contributes to our sense of well-being.



The obligation to be in a particular place at a particular time, working as part of a team towards a common goal, gives us a sense of structure and purpose that we find difficult to impose on ourselves. For a lot of us, the workplace has also taken over from the community as the place of human contact. For most of us, work often functions as a social club, an information network, an informal dating agency and a marriage bureau.

Although genuine workaholics are uncommon, many of us are job addicts without realising it. When we can’t work for whatever reason, we show similar signs to real addicts who are deprived of their ‘fix’- we become irritable and lethargic. Among newly-retired men, death rates increase significantly in the first six months after leaving employment. For most of their lives, their personality, self-esteem and status have been defined by work; without it, they lose their appetite for life.

Life wasn't always so driven by employment, however. Work in the pre-industrial age was task-oriented not time-structured, focussing not on money but on tasks necessary for survival. Whole communities worked together so there was less division between work and 'free time'. The industrial Revolution radically changed how people worked. Suddenly, work was no longer structured by seasons, but by the clock. Work was separated from the rest of life, and began to provide money rather than food and goods.

More recently, the revolution in Information Technology has again changed the nature of work and employment. The workplace itself may become redundant. Two million employees in the UK now work from home, keeping in touch via email and phone. Many employers say that working 'remotely' improves productivity, as workers are happier and waste less time commuting. There are downsides too, however, as workers lose touch with the workplace and people there.

We will undoubtedly have to accept that the nature of work has changed and will continue to do so. After all, we were conditioned into accepting the nine-to-five working day and there is no reason why we can't be conditioned into accepting something else. This article was written at home in the country during bursts of hard work interspersed with periods of inactivity. Perhaps that's the natural work-rhythm to which we will return?