

Why do people work?



What is 'work'?

'Work' is a hard word to define. One person's idea of work can be another person's idea of leisure. Something that you dislike doing at work, you might quite enjoy in a leisure setting.

Is work still work if you don't get paid for it? People work productively in all areas of life without being paid. This unpaid work includes:

- housework in households, child care and shopping for the home
- volunteer and community work
- work done free of charge (favours for others).

Why work?

When you ask people why they work, a lot of them will say they're 'only in it for the money'. When you work for money you can be financially independent and have some control over your life.

Sometimes money truly is the only reason a person works. But most people have more substantial reasons for working.

- They like to spend their days doing something they're good at.
- They like being productive.
- Other people need their skills, and they feel obliged to supply them.

What if you didn't work and you had every day to yourself? You could choose to go to the beach, watch television, go to the movies, go shopping, read books, visit friends, visit places of interest, go out for meals, play sport ...

This all sounds nice, but you'd need at least some money to do most of these things. Relaxing and doing what you please is great for a holiday, but after a while the pleasure can wear off and you can feel aimless and bored.

Work and your values

The benefits you get from paid and unpaid work are strongly linked to your values. When you know what your values are regarding work, you can:

- work out what you hope to achieve through working – what your overall ambitions are
- set meaningful goals for yourself
- choose jobs that will satisfy you in ways that are deeper than your 'hip pocket'
- understand why you feel dissatisfied in a job that doesn't fit with your values.

Two reasons that people work are:

- to perform rewarding and meaningful activities
- for companionship.

'Rewarding' and 'meaningful' work allows you to:

- fulfil most of your material needs
 - meet your financial obligations
 - feel that you fit into and contribute to society
 - feel a sense of wellbeing and accomplishment
 - meet and interact with people of different backgrounds and cultures.
- 'Companionship' at work means having continued, shared interaction with other people, including sharing the rewards of a job well done, whether they be a sales bonus or a commendation from the managing director.

Job satisfaction

People get job satisfaction when their work:

- pays them enough to fulfil their most important needs
- pays them fairly for the work they do
- provides a protective environment and ensures their safety as they work
- gives them a social life
- gives them a sense of personal achievement by presenting them with new challenges, helping them grow and be creative
- makes them feel good about themselves – they can see themselves gaining experience, expertise and status, and being acknowledged by their colleagues and superiors.

Your way of life depends on work

What would happen if no-one worked? How would we all survive? The goods and services we need to live and enjoy in our leisure time simply couldn't exist. For example, if you needed to catch a bus:

- who would design and construct the bus?
- who would supply the petrol for the bus?
- who would drive the bus?

If you wanted to read a newspaper:

- who would write the articles and take the pictures for it?
- who would make the paper to print it on?
- who would print it?
- who would distribute it and how?

Most Western societies are set up so that we buy essentials like water, food, clothing and shelter, rather than providing them for ourselves. We also need things like electricity and transport. Just to exist costs money, and to do any kind of activity will involve costs. Most of us work to meet those costs.

Why do you work? What about your friends and family?

Think about why you work.

- Think about the reasons why you work. Write down everything you can think of, as each reason occurs to you.
- When you can't think of any more, look at the list you've made and put the reasons in order from the most important to the least important.

Interview five people you know and ask them why they work. Below are some questions you could ask them.

- What's the purpose of work for you?
- Why is work important in your life?
- What would happen if your job didn't get done?