

INTRODUCTION

We've Had Enough . . . Have You?

This book is based on a simple idea: Our beliefs about work—forty hours, Monday through Friday, eight to five—are outdated, outmoded, out to lunch. Every day people go to work and waste their time, their company's time, and their lives in a system based on assumptions—about how work gets done and what work looks like—that don't apply in today's global, 24/7 economy.

We go to work and give everything we have and are treated like we're children who, if left unattended, will steal candy.

We go to work and watch someone who isn't very good at their job get promoted because they got in earlier and stayed later than anyone else.

We go to work and sit through overlong, overstaffed meetings to talk about the next overlong, overstaffed meeting.

We see talented, competent, productive people get penalized for having kids, for not being good at office politics, for being a little different.

We go to work in the Information Age, but the nature of the workplace hasn't fundamentally changed since the Industrial Age.

But most of all—most tragically of all—we play the game. We play the game even though we know in our heart of hearts the game doesn't make any sense.

Why do you think Sunday night is tinged with dread? That is you telling yourself that the way we work is unhealthy. That life isn't meant to be lived this way. The modern workplace makes people physically and mentally sick, undermines families, and wastes precious time and energy. Everybody knows work sucks and yet we do nothing. If the dismal nature of work weren't the norm; if our assumptions and expectations about work weren't so ingrained; if, for example, work were some kind of new disease that suddenly appeared and cost businesses billions and ruined people's lives, you can bet that we would be marshaling our collective resources to find a cure.

So why doesn't it change?

Maybe because we assume that work has to be drudgery.

(If it were fun it would be play, right?)

Maybe because we have been brought up to believe that by definition work is unproductive, political, and unfair.

Maybe because no one has proposed a reasonable, effective alternative.

Everywhere there are solutions that are not solutions.

The solution is not flextime. Flextime is a joke.

The solution is not work-life balance. Under the current system, balance is impossible.

The answer is not getting better organized, or No-Meeting

Wednesdays, or setting your alarm fifteen minutes early to beat the morning rush, or spending a Saturday making all your lunches for the month.

There are no tips or tricks or helpful hints that are going to solve this problem.

There are no answers in the employee handbook.

The only solution is to change the game entirely.

We're starting a movement that will reshape the way many things in this country, and across the world, get done. We're offering not a new way of working, but a new way of living. This new way of living is based on the radical idea that you are an adult. It's based on the radical idea that even though you owe your company your best work, you do not owe them your time or your life. This new way of living is practical and simple (though not necessarily easy), and while it's a sweeping change from how we live life now, it requires only a basic adjustment in your thinking.

We are talking about a Results-Only Work Environment or ROWESM.

In a Results-Only Work Environment, people can do whatever they want, whenever they want, as long as the work gets done. Many companies say their people can telecommute or work a flexible schedule. But these arrangements often still include core hours, or can be dissolved should business needs change, or are doled out stingily as a perk for the privileged few. In a ROWE, you can literally *do* whatever you want whenever you want as long as your work is getting done. You have complete control over your life as long as your work gets done.

You can go grocery shopping at ten in the morning on Tuesday. You can take a nap at two in the afternoon on Wednesday.

You can go to a movie at one in the afternoon on Thursday. And you don't have to ask anyone's permission or tell anyone where you're going. You just do it. As long as your work gets done—as long as you get *results*—then your life is your own.

You get paid for a chunk of work, not for a chunk of time.

We realize that this sounds too good to be true. This kind of freedom and control and trust sounds like the stuff of rainbows and unicorns. But this idea didn't come out of the blue. The seeds of a Results-Only Work Environment started in 2001, when a leader at Best Buy corporate headquarters was looking for help in making the company an Employer of Choice. The Employer of Choice committee was an internal task force whose goal was to figure out how to make Best Buy a top consideration among talented people looking for employment. The group conducted a survey asking employees what they most wanted from work. The overwhelming response was, Just trust me with my time. Trust me to do my job and I will deliver results and be a happier employee to boot.

Enter Cali Ressler. Even though Cali was only twenty-four years old and an hourly employee, one of the leaders of the Employer of Choice committee asked her to help turn this insight into action.

This turned out to be the perfect opportunity for Cali, given where she was in her life. Best Buy was one of her first jobs out of college, and she was quickly learning the absurdities of the workplace. The veterans around the office were teaching her how to play the game, how to fill out time cards to reflect the number of expected hours (not actual time worked), how to look busy when the boss was walking the floor, how to appear

“engaged” by asking lots of questions in meetings. Mostly she was learning how unhappy everyone was at work, not so much with the tasks they had to accomplish but with the whole culture of the workplace. Even the salaried employees—the people who seemed to have power and control—were always looking over their shoulder.

In an effort to respond to this misery, Cali helped create the Alternative Work Program, a pilot program that gave people a choice from a predetermined set of flexible schedules. The choices were all based on typical flextime arrangements (telecommuting; four ten-hour days; eight-hour days that started and ended at unorthodox times), but the AWP was different in two key ways. First, *everyone* in the 320-person department who took part in the pilot got to participate. The flexibility wasn't just available to top performers or those above a certain job level. Second, the employees (not the managers) decided which of the four options was best for them, and once they made their choice it was nonnegotiable. It was up to the department as a whole to figure out how to make everyone's individual choice work.

It was this control over schedule that planted the seed for what would become a Results-Only Work Environment. Cali saw that if you gave people even a little control over their time they immediately began to see the benefits both at work and at home. The people in AWP were happier and more productive and they didn't want the pilot to end.

Jody came on board in 2003, and the insights and ideas gained during AWP started to grow and change. As we developed and refined what a Results-Only Work Environment was and how it worked, the culture of Best Buy started to

change. Some managers were supportive and others weren't. Regardless, the idea grew and grew and eventually took on a life of its own. By the time this book is published, approximately three thousand Best Buy corporate employees will work in a ROWE, with plans to test ROWE in the retail environment.

Thanks to ROWE, people at Best Buy are happier with their lives and their work. The company has benefited too, with increases in productivity averaging 35 percent and sharp decreases in voluntary turnover rates, as much as 90 percent in some divisions.

This book is about bringing this commonsense, effective, and mutually beneficial approach to living and working to the rest of the world. In the coming pages we'll explore why the workplace is broken and reveal the hidden attitudes and beliefs behind the problem. Then we'll describe what a Results-Only Work Environment is and how it works, and how it addresses the problem of work. You'll also get a taste of what life is like in a ROWE (hint: it is very, very good).

Along the way we won't be afraid to acknowledge the challenges a ROWE creates for an organization. The good news is that we're not advocating that companies radically change their values, their identity, or their core business. People and companies don't have to change who they are, just how they work.

In the coming pages we hope to build a compelling case for why everyone should be in a Results-Only Work Environment. We'll tell stories and give results, but we won't bully you with statistics. We doubt there is a single perfect

fact out there—every year stress costs American businesses \$300 billion; the average worker only puts in three hours of real work per day—that will somehow wake people up. All you have to do is Google the words *work* and *family* or *stress* and *productivity* and you'll have all the statistics you'll ever need. Presenting a rational argument for why work sucks isn't going to change anything, because our attitudes about work aren't based on reason. We need a new approach to the problem.

Ultimately what we are offering is a proven cure:

for the problem of work,
for being treated like a child by your company,
for feeling stressed-out about time.

We know it sounds too good to be true, but it's not. You still have to do your job. But in a Results-Only Work Environment everyone gets to act like an adult and gets treated like an adult.

You get your dignity back.

You get your time back.

You get your life back.

And if all that can be true, if you can have your time and work and live and be a person, then the question you're faced with every day isn't, Do I really have to go to work today? but, How can I contribute?

How do I contribute to this thing called life? What can I do today to benefit my family, my company, myself?

Changing how we work is not going to be easy. There will be a lot of resistance, and that resistance will come from

surprising places (including inside you). But we need this change. As you read these words we are out there fighting to make work productive, fair, and humane for everyone. We hope that in our lifetime this commonsense approach to work isn't the exception, but the new norm.

Voices from a ROWE: Gina

Gina works on a team that focuses on strengths-based training. She is also part of the company's diversity group. She has been at Best Buy for four and a half years and in a Results-Only Work Environment for three and a half years. She is in her mid-thirties.*

I look at my parents' generation when you went to work for one company and you fully expected to be there your whole life. And then my mom got laid off and it was such a blow. Her attitude was, How could you do this to me?

My relationship with my company is different. We trade work for money. It's not personal. And I think we've come to this point where ROWE can be successful because enough people are ready to not look at employers as parents. I don't expect Best Buy to take care of me for the rest of my life. They have to treat you fairly. But in a free market, if it isn't working out for either party, then it's over.

*Stories like this one that appear throughout the book have been edited for clarity but are otherwise in the person's own words. The names and some of the business details have been changed to protect privacy.

I think for some managers there is the expectation that they are still kind of the parent. Becoming a manager means you're in charge. Part of being in charge means having control. That means having control over people. Often that means enforcing the rules just because they're the rules.

I have a friend at another company who was having trouble managing an employee who is a free spirit. My friend struggled with the guy because he wasn't around as much, but he was his best employee. My friend said he wanted to give him higher-level work but he couldn't because being in the office for a certain number of hours was part of what they measured people on, and this employee was failing.

To me this is financially irresponsible for that organization. Why did anyone care how long that guy was there? What kind of message does that send? If I build a cot under my desk but I'm not performing, does that make me a good worker?

I have another friend who is an economist and a college professor, so he's already living in a Results-Only Work Environment. It's just not called that. Still, his idea of what work should look like is based on this old corporate model. He once said to me, "They must need you at your desk. Otherwise they wouldn't have given you one."

So I like to talk to him about how being measured by results is a much better measure than time at your desk. I try to put it in economic terms. From the employer's point of view, the risk that someone is not at their desk is worth the reward. The risk is that they will not do their job. But you can't monitor someone 24/7, so that risk is there anyway. But the reward of giving them freedom is if they actually do their job they will stay at their job longer. Once you've been in a ROWE and have that power, you don't want to work anywhere else.

CHAPTER ONE

Why Work Sucks

I've been late to work for the last three days, and I'm starting to get "the eye" from my boss. This morning, I race to get ready and get into my car with an hour to make a commute that usually takes me about thirty minutes. Plenty of time to get to the office by eight, and maybe even by seven forty-five to get a few extra points. Then I see it. Traffic backed up two stoplights behind the entrance ramp to the freeway. No way. There's construction on the other route I could take, so this is my only bet. I start sweating and panicking, knowing this will knock me back at least an hour, putting me at the office at nine, not my wishful seven forty-five. I'm positive I will be fired, or at least put on a warning for being late four days in a row. I can feel my blood pressure rising, my heart racing, and I so badly just want to step on the gas and fly down the shoulder as far as I can go. I reach for my phone, knowing what I have to do. I fight with myself because what I'm about to do feels awful. I convince myself that if I don't do it, I will lose my job. I dial my boss's number. I get his voice mail. I cough and say, in a raspy voice, "Jim, I'm just not feeling well today. I don't think I'll be able to make it in. I was up all

night with a fever. [Cough, clearing throat.] I'll see you tomorrow."

I'm so excited—my husband and I have plans to go to dinner at my favorite restaurant to celebrate our anniversary. The restaurant is an hour away and to make our six o'clock reservation during rush hour, I'll need to leave work at four thirty. Leaving at this time is unheard of where I work, but tonight I don't care what anyone says about me. I arrive at the office and find out that my boss has called a surprise meeting with my team. She proceeds to tell us that she hasn't seen the dedication she needs to see on our new project. She expects to see us all working until at least six every night to "put in our time." I talk with her after the meeting to let her know that I'll be leaving at four thirty for my anniversary dinner, but I'll work until seven every other night this week. She glares at me and lets me know that there are people lined up for my job—I can make my own decisions. I know, in that moment, that my husband and I will need to celebrate this weekend instead of tonight. I cancel our reservation and call my husband. He asks me when I'm going to realize what's really important in life and hangs up the phone. I ask myself the same question as I lay my head down on my desk.

Why does work suck?

If you ask people why work sucks they will usually give one of two answers. They will reach for something vague—it's a hectic world; people are busy; that's life. Or they will latch onto something specific to their workplace—a controlling boss who clocks every minute of every break, an unfocused management team that creates a constant state of emergency.

But we would argue that the answer is both deeper and more widespread. There are systemic problems that every workplace shares. The details change from person to person and place to place, but the underlying problem is the same. And it's a bigger problem than life being hard or that business now travels at blinding speeds.

Work sucks in corporate life today because we have time all wrong.

Just look at the two stories above. The first person wants to "score points" for coming in fifteen minutes early. The manager in the second story expects people to stay until six because that somehow shows dedication. Coming in late four days a week might cost you your job. Staying late every night might get you that promotion. You can't leave at four thirty and you better not come in at nine. And at no point is there any discussion of the quality of the work being done. It's just time, time, time.

We all labor under a myth:

Time + physical presence = results.

When it comes to work our attitudes about time are so omnipresent they are almost invisible, and here are two trivial examples that we have picked exactly because they are so offhand and random. When New York mayor Michael Bloomberg gave the commencement address at the College of Staten Island, he said some good things to the future workers of America about taking risks and learning how to collaborate with people, but he put the most passion and force into this statement:

"If you're the first one in in the morning and the last one to leave at night and you take fewer vacation days and never take

a sick day, you will do better than the people that don't do that. It is very simple.”

We think that's a strange sentiment coming from the mayor of New York. We're not knocking having a solid work ethic, but when we think of the individuals who have made it in the greatest city in the world, we think of their creativity, innovation, savvy, and competitiveness. We think of people who have brought something to the table—whether it's in art or finance or government—that no one else has brought before. We certainly don't think about people putting in hours.

The other example typifies the kind of career advice we give people who work in nontraditional work environments. It's from a website that offers tips to freelancers for how to be successful:

“Log your time and work. As you have no time clock and no one to watch over you, you need to account for your time, if not for your employer or your client, then for yourself. It's important that you not have a day go by without knowing what you've really accomplished, so log what you do, and how long it takes. It may seem like extra work, but really it just takes a few seconds after every task.”

This is interesting, as if you wouldn't know the quality of the work you've done if you didn't also judge it in terms of time. The line “if not for your employer or your client, then for yourself” says it all. The assumption is that you need to keep track of your time for more than billing purposes. Without knowing how long a piece of work takes you can't measure its true value.

This unwritten rule about time applies to just about everybody, from administrative assistants on up to the senior leadership. With the exception of sales people, who either deliver their numbers or don't, most people are judged by a mixture of

results and time spent in the office. You are expected to do your job and to complete your tasks, but you are also expected to put in forty hours or even more.

Strangely we only do this at work. If you're out running errands on Saturday and getting things done, you're not measuring yourself by the clock. You might be frustrated that a specific chore is taking so long, but you don't look at a pile of laundry and think, I'd better make sure I'm putting enough hours into this. You either accomplish what you set out to accomplish or you don't. If anything there is incentive to get things done more quickly and efficiently because then you'll have more time to do something else. At work, even if we accomplish our tasks we are expected to fill the hours. Because by definition a full-time job takes forty hours or more to complete.

Why do we look at time in this way? Maybe it's a relic of the Industrial Age, when if you weren't at your place on the assembly line then the work wasn't getting done. If you didn't put in your time the job didn't get done. Or maybe this attitude about time goes back even further, back to when most people worked by hand. If you were practicing a craft, then time put into making a cabinet or a suit of armor would have more directly translated into a quality piece.

There was a time when the forty-hour workweek served a good purpose. We owe the forty-hour workweek to the Fair Labour Standards Act of 1938, which also ended the practice of child labour and established the minimum wage. The idea was to make labor uniform and fair back when companies had too much control over workers' lives. But somehow the forty-hour workweek morphed into the gold standard for competency, efficiency, and effectiveness.

In an information and service economy it doesn't make

sense to use time as a measurement for a job well-done. What does forty hours even mean? And what does forty hours get you? Naturally it still takes time to do research or build a body of knowledge or build relationships, but the individual actions we take every day, the little units of work have more to do with communication and problem solving. Today we do more work with our brains than with our hands, and knowledge work requires a different set of assumptions about productivity.

Knowledge work requires fluidity (ideas can happen anytime, not just between eight and five) and concentration (being rested and engaged is more important than being on the clock) and creativity (again, you're either on or you're not on, regardless of the hour). Today we spend our lives performing in jobs in which it's harder to measure effectiveness in terms of time. After all, how long does it take to think of the answer to a colleague's question? Or to have an insight about the marketplace? Or to say the right thing to close a sale?

When we try to live our lives under this new set of demands but under the old set of assumptions, we get the stories that opened this chapter. We get burned-out, frustrated people struggling to reconcile the old and the new. So what? you might say. These kinds of anecdotes are so commonplace they almost don't seem worth mentioning. That's life, right? Everyone has moments like these at work. There is something about time that stresses everyone out. If the workplace is unfair it's unfair for everyone. Don't call it the end of the world. Call it Tuesday.

We agree that these kinds of stories are ordinary and even mundane, but we doubt that you could find anyone who would argue that they are evidence of a workplace that is ideal. And we bet you could find a lot of people who might wonder how much longer we can go on like this. At this level of stress. In

this toxic atmosphere. At this relentless pace toward a goal that no one can see because no one has defined it. We've gotten used to the working world, but does anybody like it? Is anyone truly benefiting? Few individuals are giving their best. Few companies are getting the best from their people. The fact that we get time wrong in corporate America may seem small, but those small moments add up to big problems both for employee and business.

One of the most recognizable consequences of our misplaced faith in time is Presenteeism. Let's take Bob, for example. Bob has mastered the politics of corporate America. Now in his late fifties he has seen it all—downsizing, outsourcing, rightsizing. But he has continued to rise through the ranks because he knows how to play the game. He gets in before everyone else, scoring that sweet parking spot by the front door, the one where everyone who comes in later can note with a mixture of envy and resentment that Bob outdid them again. During the day Bob goes to every meeting. He eats lunch at his desk. He turns the lights out at night. His bosses describe him as “a workhorse” and “a rock.” You can't deny that he's working, right? He puts in so much time. He must be doing something!

No matter that Bob doesn't really *do* anything. No matter that Bob hasn't contributed meaningfully to the bottom line in years.

At some time in our lives, most of us, whether we like to admit it or not, are guilty of Presenteeism, which is any time you're physically present and putting in time, but you're not really doing your job. Your body is in the building, but your mind is somewhere else.

Presenteeism is when you're at your computer playing

World of Warcraft or shopping on eBay or keeping tabs on the NCAA tournament. Presenteeism is when you're on time for work but then spend an hour online reading the paper. Presenteeism is when you're constantly telling people that you're there for them, that you're available, that you have time for their concerns, but you're not doing everything you can to solve the problem at hand, often because you're not exactly sure what the problem at hand even is. Presenteeism creates a mentality that leads to statements like this:

"I finished that project a day ahead of time, but don't tell anyone. I don't want to hand it in early or else the boss will just dump more work on my desk."

"Team, we're giving Jan the Employee of the Month award today. She put in some really long hours last month, and I have a feeling she was even here on the weekends. We're lucky to have such a dedicated, committed player on our team. Let's give it up for Jan!"

"Paul, I've seen you leaving before three pretty often lately. You know, as long as you're putting in your forty hours, it doesn't bother me if you leave early. There have been some complaints from the team, though. Some folks have seen you putting in twenty-five to thirty hours in the office. Let's step that up. As you know, we have a lot of work to do."

But this mentality begs some important questions:

If you are getting your job done, then why are you punished by having to fill your time?

If you are adding value to the company, if you are performing, then who cares if it takes you forty hours or forty seconds to do it?

If you are skating by, filling the hours, watching the clock, then what are you doing with your life?

We're not calling out individual employees. In fact, just the opposite. Presenteeism doesn't happen because people are lazy or unfocused or not dedicated to their work. Presenteeism happens everywhere, every day, because the way we measure work performance is wrong. It's a flaw in the system, not in the people.

Our false worship of time distorts behavior. Because we're not just doing our job but making sure our job fits into a forty-hour workweek that happens between eight and five (with a half hour or an hour for lunch) we have to jump through hoops to make the job fit the clock.

The clock turns us into liars. We call in sick when we have to take care of family business. Or we put in long hours to make up for not being able to accomplish the task at hand.

The clock disrupts engagement. On any given day you either feel overworked (I can't believe I have to do all of this in forty hours!) or underworked (I can't believe I have to be here for forty hours!).

The clock discourages innovation and creativity. You can't be motivated to solve the company's problems because even if you do you are still judged on how much time you put in. You can't serve two masters.

We aren't blaming this all on The Man. Our attitudes about time are so ingrained that we are all guilty of this kind of misguided thinking. Even those who work for a progressive company—even those who are in a largely results-driven work culture—aren't immune from these outdated attitudes.

We show up at work and instead of thinking about what we can do to drive results, we try to figure out how we can both accomplish our goals and do it in

a way that fits within the narrow confines of an eight-to-five day.

We feel admiration (or envy) for the people who log the most hours at work because we feel they are somehow working harder.

We complain about how many hours we're putting in, as if this makes us heroes.

We eat sometime between eleven thirty and one thirty and only for an hour, because that is the acceptable time to eat and the acceptable duration for eating.

We're skeptical that people who are on flextime programs are putting in enough hours to do their job.

We worry that coming in at eight fifteen will brand us as being "late." Or we get excited about coming in at seven forty-five so we can be seen as being "early."

We don't question for a minute that work should be measured in terms of time, that some jobs are "part-time" and others are "full-time" and that forty hours is the norm.

When we talk to people about these attitudes we find that people understand that the system is broken. When we first started creating the model for what would become a Results-Only Work Environment, we didn't need to tell people that attitudes about time were misguided. Everyone knew it intuitively, and once we started giving them the opportunity to talk about these unwritten rules it was like a revelation.

Before the Alternative Work Program was formalized at Best Buy, Cali was charged with running focus groups for the 320 people who were going to take part in the experiment. A typical group was made up of 10 to 15 people and they were a

mixed bag of hourly employees, lower-level salaried employees, and upper-level management. The goal of these groups was to figure out how to create a program that addressed this somewhat amorphous issue of trust. A lot of the comments were all over the map and addressed technical concerns (making sure there was good communication, clear goals, feedback tools to monitor how the pilot was going), but the refrain was that people were desperate to get control over their time.

There was an epic sadness to these meetings, because everyone knew what they were missing. Even if they didn't articulate it this clearly, they knew that their jobs were robbing them of precious time. Time with their friends and family. Time for professional development. In some cases—if they were triple booked for meetings all day long—even time to do their jobs.

Why do we put up with this? Where does time get its awesome power over our lives? You might think that some important researcher and thinker has done a long-term, multivariable study that proves that we need to have this business model based on time because the data shows that people who aren't working at least forty hours can't be effective in a global, 24/7 economy. But you would be wrong. We have these attitudes about time and we let time have this power over us because of one thing:

Belief.



The advice from Mayor Bloomberg and the freelance success website is not only an illustration of how misguided we are about how we think about time, but also an example of how flimsy our thinking is when it comes to work in general. We're not bashing them. Instead we'd rather show that the

foundation of our assumptions about work has gotten shakier and shakier as technology and globalization have changed the world.

Look at Addie. Just out of college, she is new to the workforce. Addie is a smart and capable employee. She grew up one of those kids whom people label “overscheduled” but while her life is very full, she’s also excellent at managing her priorities. In college she was the type of student who got good grades, had a boyfriend, took part in extracurricular activities, and was able to make it all work. She’s an effective, dedicated worker, but while her career is important to her, so are her friends and outside interests. For her, all aspects of her life matter.

Unfortunately her attitude about life isn’t sitting well with her manager and the rest of her team. She likes to work at odd hours and at coffee shops, but her boss says that that doesn’t fly. According to her manager, the other people on Addie’s team don’t like it when she leaves the building to get some quiet time to work, or when she asks to leave early on Fridays, even though she’s completed her work. On one hand, Addie draws praise from her boss, who notes that people like her and appreciate her contributions. “You have great ideas,” Addie’s boss says. “But if you’re coming and going all the time you won’t get promoted. People won’t take you seriously. After all, perception is reality.”

Perception is reality.

How many times have you heard that expression with regard to work? Maybe you’ve said it yourself or something like it.

“Better look busy. I hear the CEO is on the floor today.”

“It’s not what you know but who you know.”

“I have to make that meeting. It’s my only chance this week to get face time with my boss.”

The funny thing about these attitudes about work is that they aren’t taught in school. You don’t learn about how the workplace works in a class. There are books about how to get ahead in business or how to make friends and influence people, but there aren’t books that teach you how to behave at work. There is no resource for normal.

So where do these beliefs come from? We learn about work from watching our parents and elders experience work, from the stories they tell. We hear advice like Mayor Bloomberg’s or get some coaching from our mom or dad about how to act professional before going off to our first job. But mostly we learn about what is normal at work by experiencing it. One of the lessons work teaches us right away—whether we’re working at a restaurant or doing grunt work in an office or mowing lawns for our neighbors—is that there is the job you do and the job you appear to be doing.

You have your tasks and responsibilities, aka The Job.

You also have the sometimes unwritten and unspoken rules that you have to play by, aka Work.

These unspoken and unwritten rules are based on beliefs that we all share about how work gets done and what it looks like to get work done. We have so many beliefs about work it would be impossible to name them all. Here is a partial list:

- Most work happens from Monday to Friday, eight to five.
- People at their workstations are doing work.
- Results are proportional to efforts.

- “Summer Hours” programs help create work-life balance for our employees.
- People who work a lot of hours get more work done than people who work fewer hours.
- Nonexempt employee status is a way for us to protect our employees from working too many hours.
- Working “out of hours” is not good for work-life balance.
- Flexibility creates performance issues.
- People in flexible work environments don’t have enough time to get their work done.
- If people can get their work done in less time, they should get more work.
- The best customer service happens face-to-face.
- Creating more “jobs” helps us manage more work.
- Face time is necessary in order for work to get done.
- Instant availability is the measure of great customer service.
- Roles and responsibilities bring clarity to work.
- Job descriptions help people know what’s expected of them at work.
- Restructuring requires longer working hours.
- If you give people control over their schedules, they will take advantage of the system.
- Managers with direct reports cannot work from home.
- The best collaboration is done face-to-face.

In an information- or service-based economy, do these orthodoxies make sense? Or are they relics of a time when we worked in a certain way because there was no alternative? Be-

fore technology, we *had* to go to the office because that's where we kept the mimeograph machine, the landline, the Liquid Paper. We invented "management by walking around" because you couldn't leave someone a voice mail or create an internal website to monitor the progress of a project. People couldn't work virtually because there was no virtual, only physical space and real time.

We have all these assumptions about what work looks like even though in today's economy work looks less and less like it did twenty years ago.

Dig, if you will, these pictures: one of a woman walking her dog, another of a man sitting in a conference room with some other men.

Now ask yourself: Which one of them is working?

If it was fifty years ago you would automatically assume that the man was working. For one, most women didn't work. For another, what kind of work could she possibly be doing while walking the dog? Also, just look at that man! He's right there! In a conference room in an office building, a place where work gets done! True, he is just sitting there and we can't know his thoughts, or if he's even paying attention, or if he's had a worthwhile idea in recent memory. Who knows? Maybe after this meeting he's about to be fired. But he looks like he's working.

In fact, even today, with women in the workplace, we're still likely to make all kinds of assumptions about these two people, that work happens in certain kinds of places, at certain times, with certain kinds of people. Beliefs about work have been formed over generations and now they're so ingrained that people don't even question them. And yet, read almost any business success story and we promise you that

the inspiration for that new product, service, or company didn't happen in a cubicle. The stories of great brands like Starbucks or great companies like Apple start out in the world, or in an inventor's garage, not in a conference room with eight people staring at a flip chart.

But still we cling to these old ideas even though we're stifling ourselves. Just look at poor Addie. She's bright and capable. She blazed through college juggling all aspects of her life. So why does her boss assume that the only way Addie can get her work done is if she is in her cube from eight to five? What is this weird thing about how Addie won't be taken seriously if she doesn't put on a show of work (as opposed to simply doing her job)? Why do we accept nonsense like "perception is reality"?

In fact, our assumptions about how work gets done and what work looks like are so entrenched that any alternative, even an effective one, is treated as comedy. Take this opening to a Reuters article from July 18, 2000, titled "This Friday, Make It Real Casual."

"This Friday is the first National Work at Home Day, an occasion when there won't be any need to feel guilty about negotiating a multimillion-dollar deal in your boxers and bunny slippers, or interviewing a chief executive while wearing just a towel."

Isn't that interesting? Why would someone who just negotiated a multimillion-dollar deal have to feel guilty about anything?

Our beliefs about where and how work gets done distort how we evaluate work just as the power of time does. Certainly work can get done in a cubicle or in a meeting, but does it have to get done that way? If one of your business contacts is calling you on the phone with a question, do they really care if you

are in your cube or at the gym? We have very little “face time” with our overseas partners and yet doesn’t our work still get accomplished with them? Most of what we do is trade information and ideas (and often electronically). There isn’t the absolute need for us to congregate in offices.

But what about meetings? What about teams? We’ll spend more time on meetings and management in the coming chapters, but for now we’ll just say this:

Everyone knows that for every productive meeting there are at least two more that aren’t.

Everyone knows that once a meeting reaches a certain size it’s likely that at least three people will be there who don’t have to be there.

Everyone knows that a good portion of what is accomplished in a meeting—meaning the actual exchange of information—could be handled through e-mail.

We think the point of meetings is to get work done. But meetings are also a way of expressing and exercising our outdated beliefs about work. This is why people who are double and triple booked are seen as more important than people who don’t have as many meetings. This is why people who can make other people go to meetings are seen as powerful, even if this power has nothing to do with effectiveness. This is why you can skate by in a job just by attending lots of meetings, because if you showed up then naturally you contributed. The work that gets done in meetings is fine. The unwritten and unspoken rules that surround meetings are one of the big reasons why work sucks.

As Gina noted in her story, there is a definite risk-reward

equation at work if you don't give people control over their time and their work. If you let your beliefs about work serve as your guide, you are robbing yourself and your coworkers and employees of the control they might even need to do their jobs. Just when you need to be as fluid as possible, just when you need to be lean and mean and thoughtful and wise and nimble and proactive and all those business things you need to be, you are hamstrung by assumptions. You're stuck in a cube with a desktop computer and a phone with a cord so you can be there in person should your manager walk over to check up on whether or not you're working. The game becomes looking busy instead of working hard and solving problems and contributing. It's a game no one wins. You lose your freedom, your motivation, your soul, and in exchange for control over your life, your company often gets little more than a show of work.



None of this is written down anywhere. Employee manuals have time and vacation policy guidelines, but people don't walk around living by the rule books. The culture at a workplace is a living, breathing thing. So how do these beliefs get reinforced?

Let's take Heather as an example. Heather might be the unhappiest person at her company. She's in her early forties, recently divorced with two kids who are in day care. She is the only person making that family go. She's not always the best worker, but she's better than most and she can really pour it on when it counts. Her problem is that her life is killing her. No matter how hard she works there is always some-

thing that isn't getting done. Personal life or work life—neither is flourishing. She puts her kids in day care when they are sick and feels bad all day. She's constantly being taken to task for her attendance. Her coworkers treat her like a fallen woman. Sometimes the cues are subtle—like when the room goes quiet when she walks in—but other times people say it to her face, that if she can't seem to manage both family and work then maybe she should find another job. Over time this all adds up, until it gets to the point at which even the slightest comment can deflate her. One day she is fifteen minutes late for a morning meeting that hasn't really started yet. As she enters the room her boss looks up and says, "Nice of you to join us," and as sad as it sounds, this little jab pretty much destroys her whole day.

Human beings judge everything—especially other people. Their attire, their hair, their driving, their cooking, their speech, their financial well-being, their occupation, even their child-rearing skills. We make judgments automatically, and sometimes we choose to say out loud what's in our heads. Some people are outwardly cruel, cutting down their friends and family with barely veiled references to their shortcomings. Some people are well-meaning but unthinking, making otherwise innocent comments about how much money someone makes, how their marriage is going, their weight, their hair.

Still there are rules. Part of growing up is learning what you can and cannot say to people, what is polite and what is rude. Strangely, at work a lot of these rules don't apply. We have this weird permission to be shitty to one another at work. We judge people's perceived work habits. We judge how we imagine people's personal lives and personal choices affect

their work. We especially judge people about how they use their time.

We say:

“Coming in at eleven again? Boy, I wish I had your hours!”

“Another vacation—how many vacation days do you get? I haven’t taken a vacation in five years!”

“How in the world could John get a promotion? He’s never even here!”

“I wish I smoked. Then I could always be on break and never have to work.”

We call this kind of judgment SludgeSM. Sludge is the negative commentary that occurs naturally in a workplace and is based on outdated beliefs about time and work.

We’ll go into Sludge in more detail in the next chapter, but for now let’s just say that Sludge performs a very important function at work. When we judge people—when we Sludge them—we are expressing outdated attitudes about time and about what work looks like and how it gets done. We judge to make a point that someone else is different. We judge to make the point that even if someone’s crime is small, they are acting outside the rules of work. We judge to make ourselves look better, to show other people (and ourselves) that we’re the hardest working, we’re the most dedicated. Most of all we judge them to *reinforce* those unspoken beliefs about work. It’s a vicious cycle.

Time is the misguided measure.

Beliefs about work give time more power than it deserves.

Acting on their beliefs, people judge (or Sludge) one another to give time power and reinforce the status quo.

When you look at work through this lens, then even seemingly “innocent” phrases start to take on deeper meanings.

“Ten o’clock and just getting in?”

The person who says this believes that work can only take place from eight to five in a physical place. They’re telling you that you better start coming in on time or you’ll be branded as a bad worker.

“I’m not surprised Bill got that promotion. He’s always here!”

The person who says this believes not only that if you’re not at work you can’t be doing work, but that if you aren’t seen “working” then you’ll never be recognized for your achievements. They’re reinforcing the idea that the people who work the longest hours must be getting the most done.

“Rita is in the lactation room again. I wish I had kids. I’d never have to work.”

Translation: People who have children aren’t as committed to their jobs because they’re seen as not available for work. They also work fewer hours, which means they can’t make a positive impact. This person is sending you a warning that if you take your career seriously, having kids can be a detriment.

As you start to hear what’s really behind these kinds of comments (or catch yourself making them) you’ll begin to realize how sick work is. How our sense of time and our beliefs about how work gets done are really holding us back. When we judge one another in this way, we’re championing a system that distracts us from what really matters (results) and focuses our energy on what doesn’t (time and place). We walk around

feeling guilty and incompetent (or making other people feel guilty and incompetent), either sleepwalking through the day by filling up the hours, or by having to craft elaborate work-arounds to a system that couldn't be designed any better to retard accomplishment.

Next time you're at work, try listening for Sludge. The next time people are gossiping or venting about another employee's work habits, listen to the underlying assumptions being made about that person. You will hear lots of strange beliefs about time and place. You will hear assumptions that have nothing to do with whether or not that person is actually doing their job, but rather the way they behave at work. You might also hear what is ultimately behind every piece of Sludge: the sound of people feeling out of control. In each of these judgments there is a core truth. I have no control. I have no control over this broken system, and so I'm forced to judge other people based on rules that I instinctually know are wrong.

If the game is to prove that you're putting in time at the office, then of course you're going to judge someone who isn't putting in their time. If you have no control over when and how you work, then of course you're going to feel jealous and resentful of someone who appears to be free. If the game is unfair but you can't change it, your only choices are to suffer in silence or to vent.

If Sludge is the sound of people feeling out of control, for management it's also an excellent means of control. Think back to the story about Heather. If you're not at work at eight then you're not performing. Somehow in the space of fifteen minutes or half an hour she went from a good employee (on time at eight every day!) to a bad employee (nice of you to join us). Using nothing other than the big hand and the little hand, her boss put Heather under her thumb, and for what?

Seemingly innocent comments tell us everything about what a workplace values. We care more about time and the appearance of being dedicated and present than we do about actual performance. We care more about controlling people than about letting them succeed. We'd rather have order than excellence.

This is why you can change jobs every year and still find yourself running into the same problems with work. This is why the love you feel in the job interview eventually sours when you find out how the place really works. This is why even “progressive” companies or “young” companies can still suck. It's not the finer points of your workplace—it's every workplace. It's not the bad boss or the unfair break policy. It's the very nature of how we work.

Time, belief, and judgment are one way of looking at the problem of work, but before we move to the next chapter, we'd like to offer another. There are two opposing forces at work on your life: demand and control.

Demands push at you from one direction, and they include things like doing your job, taking care of yourself and your home, staying connected to your family and friends. These are the basic ones. People also have demands put on them from a sick or aging parent, volunteer work, a neighborhood association, a city league softball team. Even the need to sit back once in a while and read a book counts. A demand is anything you require to live your life.

The tool for pushing back against demand is control. Imagine a typical Saturday. You might run errands, have time with family and friends, go to a movie, eat lunch, pay bills, whatever. Because you're in control of your time on Saturday you have the freedom to satisfy those demands as you see fit. You

might eat lunch at three thirty instead of a traditional “lunch-time” because you’d rather catch a movie at noon and eat afterward. You might get up an hour early and pay bills and shop online to get those chores out of the way before the rest of the house wakes up, and you do so without resentment because you’re choosing to get through the low-value work so you can enjoy what matters to you most. But in the end it doesn’t matter how you go about your day. It’s your day and as long as everything gets crossed off the list, you have no one to answer to but yourself.

When people have high demands and high control, their life can be hectic but manageable. They figure out what needs to be done and when.

When people have high demands and low control, their life is both hectic and miserable. There is nothing to figure out. They are trapped in a system that piles on the demands but denies them the control to meet those demands.

This is why work sucks. You have all these demands coming at you, from real concerns like actually accomplishing the task you’ve been hired to do, to dealing with the daily nonsense of getting to work on time, sitting through meetings, standing around the break room pretending to celebrate a co-worker’s birthday, and so on. And not only do you have the demands of work, but while you’re at work the demands of the rest of your life go unattended, and you have little to no control over how and when you can meet those demands. Your time is not your own, so you do the best you can and feel like crap for not doing any one thing as well as you’d like.

The challenge then is to increase your level of control so you can effectively meet demands. We’re not advocating that people do less work. Not at all. If you have five projects, *you’re*

still going to have five projects. What we're advocating is that all of us, both employer and employee, acknowledge that people's demands are getting higher and higher, and since you can't make those demands go away, then we absolutely must give everyone more control over how they meet those demands.

If you don't give people more control over how they meet the demands of work and life, people aren't going to be able to give their best at either. If people can't give their best at either you get a world much like the one we have now, where people are both unhappy and unproductive.

Fortunately, we live in a time when this is possible. Today technology gives people incredible power over time and information. In our personal lives, technology means we don't have to wait for the store to open to buy something. We don't have to watch our favorite show the minute it airs or come down from Mount Everest to make a phone call.

And yet when it comes to work we suddenly have to give up all these choices. We can be strong and nimble and powerful in our personal lives and yet are forced to be slow and tradition bound at work. Technology *seems* to have changed the game—people telecommute and do business via BlackBerry 24/7—but we are still playing by the old Industrial Age rules, the rules of the factory floor and the typing pool.

The laptop is colliding with the punch clock.

We're not techno-evangelists. A Results-Only Work Environment isn't about the wonders of technology. Frankly, we couldn't care less about the latest gadget. But this is about what technology *could* let us do and how we're not taking full advantage.

Most people rush to work at the same time every day when it might be more effective to work at home for all or part of

the day. You eat at your desk to *show* you're available, when you might be just as reachable eating your sandwich in the park down the street. You're punished for not being present, when there are plenty of times you've been present and doing a lot of nothing.

We waste a lot of time playing by these old rules at work even when our personal lives point to a better way. It's not that time and physical space don't matter anymore, but time and space certainly matter less. We have the practical tools to meet the demands in our lives. If only we could change our minds.

Unfortunately, knowing why work sucks isn't enough to change it. If you get rid of a broken culture there still needs to be something to take its place. That new culture is a Results-Only Work Environment, but we're not ready to be in a ROWE yet. First we have to change all those outdated attitudes. We have to challenge our beliefs, and we have to start getting rid of the judgment that goes with them. All that Sludge is weighing us down, but if people can't judge one another based on those outmoded beliefs about work and time, then they can't reinforce the old rules. If we can get rid of Sludge, then work doesn't have to suck.

Voices from a ROWE: Kara

Kara is a designer who supports the dot-com division. She is in her early thirties and has been with Best Buy for nine years. She's been in a ROWE for three years.

When my team first started ROWE our Sludge session was fresh in our minds, and we all made numerous jokes about it. We were testing the waters. Were we in this together or not? Was this ROWE thing real? Someone would get up to leave and they'd be teased about going to a movie and people would watch the interaction. Would the person feel guilty and sit back down? Or would they laugh and keep walking? If someone didn't return an e-mail after three hours the slacker jokes would start. Would the person get defensive? Or laugh it off and ask what was needed of them?

This went on for a while until the day when my manager put on her coat to go home after lunch, and she squelched the jokes and called us out on our Sludge. This was the end of the jokes, as we realized that she was fully on board and ROWE was real! It was a great day. If our manager does it, then so can we.

Still, in the beginning it was frustrating to know that someone was shopping while I was in over my head with a deadline; until later, when that same person was in over their head and *I* was shopping. I didn't want to be Sludged by my coworkers, so I didn't Sludge them. When my coworker told me that he spent an afternoon helping his son with his curveball, I told him how wonderful I thought that was. It was my way of letting him know that I expected the same reaction from him when I exercised my freedom. My whole team shared this mentality of support, which was very important in stopping Sludge and making a successful ROWE environment.

Later I realized that a big difference between my team (where we didn't Sludge each other) and the team in the next aisle (where everyone spent every day in the office) was our manager. She trusted us. She saw that we continued to meet our deadlines, and she also wanted a work-life balance for herself, and so she stopped the Sludge the way we were trained to.

In addition to a manager who fully supported ROWE, I had a team that really wanted ROWE to work. We were open and honest about any challenges that ROWE created. We had frequent, honest discussions in our team meetings. This kept us from turning Sludge jokes into a passive-aggressive way of communicating our frustrations.

Not having Sludge allows me to really feel like my work and life are in balance. I still have those crazy stretches of weeks where I probably put in more than forty hours, but now I have times when I get to shut off my computer at noon and do whatever I want with my time, Sludge (and guilt) free!