



# A New Perspective on Success

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*“The end of labor is to gain leisure.”—Aristotle*

Given the amount of labour that’s been put into building our world since Aristotle’s time, and the amount of labour that technology helps us fit into our days now, we ought to be overwhelmed with leisure time. So, why aren’t we? Despite all of our wealth and affluence, there is evidence that our lifestyles are not as fulfilling or rewarding as they should be.

Mercer’s most recent Worldwide Quality of Living Survey<sup>1</sup> revealed that North Americans, despite all of our toys, technologies, and modern-day conveniences, rank relatively low in comparison with our European counterparts. Standard indicators of quality of life include recreation and leisure time, wealth and employment, the built environment, physical and mental health, education, and social belonging. While Europe has sixteen cities amongst the world’s top twenty-five cities for quality of living, North America has only four, and this year’s findings have been consistent with past studies. Analysts speculate a number of reasons for these results; most interestingly, the fact that some European countries, like France, adopted a 35-hour work week and a standard four to six weeks of holiday in 2000.

According to Expedia’s latest vacation deprivation survey, twenty-four per cent of employed Canadians did not use all of their vacation days in 2009 and, of those surveyed, forty-two per cent of respondents reported feeling vacation deprived. That number is up from thirty-three per cent in 2008.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mercer.com/qualityoflivingpr>

<sup>2</sup> “Be a better worker—take a vacation” Caitlin Crawshaw.  
<http://www.edmontonjournal.com/health/better+worker+take+vacation/3146367/story.html>



**Being an executive or entrepreneur today means** business lunches and dinners, weekend charity events and company golf tournaments, late nights and early mornings at the office, and answering emails at home—and that’s on top of a full eight-hour workday. Given these increasingly demanding job descriptions, it’s no surprise that we rank so low in the leisure and recreation categories in quality of living surveys. As an executive or manager, you’re now expected to work at least sixty hours a week. On top of that, you’re pressured more than ever to help out with the local charity, to serve on a board of directors, and to head up a committee or two.

In professional industries like investment banking and large law firms<sup>3</sup>, a forty-hour workweek is considered inadequate and may result in job loss or failure to be promoted.<sup>4</sup> Medical residents routinely work long hours as part of their training.

In North America, the working time for upper-income professionals has increased since 1965, while total annual working time for low-skill, low-income workers has decreased.<sup>5</sup> This effect is what Professor of Economics Steven Landsburg coined as the “leisure gap”:

*“By and large, the biggest leisure gains have gone precisely to those with the most stagnant incomes—that is, the least skilled and the least educated. And conversely, the smallest leisure gains have been concentrated among the most educated, the same group that’s had the biggest gains in income.”*

This reveals that more and more responsibilities are falling onto the shoulders of our top-skilled and hardest-working.

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<sup>3</sup> “The short, unhappy history of how lawyers bill their clients.” Niki Kuckes. Legal Affairs. [http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/September-October-2002/review\\_kuckes\\_sepoct2002.msp](http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/September-October-2002/review_kuckes_sepoct2002.msp)

<sup>4</sup> “Billable hours ‘intersect’ with the profession’s woes.” Diane Curtis. California Bar Journal. [http://www.calbar.ca.gov/state/calbar/calbar\\_cbj.jsp?CatHtmlTitle=Top%20Headlines&CatHtmlPath=cbj/2008-01\\_TH\\_01\\_Billable-hours.html](http://www.calbar.ca.gov/state/calbar/calbar_cbj.jsp?CatHtmlTitle=Top%20Headlines&CatHtmlPath=cbj/2008-01_TH_01_Billable-hours.html)

<sup>5</sup> “The Theory of the Leisure Class An economic mystery: Why do the poor seem to have more free time than the rich?” Steven E. Landsburg. <http://www.slate.com/id/2161309/nav/tap1/>



**Even ancient hunter-gatherer societies had it better than we do.** The consensus among researchers (anthropologists, historians, and sociologists) has been that early hunter-gatherer societies enjoyed much more leisure time than is permitted by capitalist and agricultural societies. For instance, one camp of !Kung Bushmen was estimated to work two-and-a-half days per week, at around six hours a day!<sup>6</sup>

Overtime addicts might point to the financial gains that result from leisure-time sacrifices, but they fail to take into account the other things that suffer in consequence; namely, our mental and physical health, as well as our relationships with family and friends.

In 2004, the Government of Canada declared that obesity levels in the country had reached “epidemic” levels<sup>7</sup>, as nearly one-third of North American adults were obese. While there are certainly genetic factors that do contribute to a person’s obesity, scientists and health practitioners agree that the largest contributor to obesity is the sedentary lifestyle imposed on the business person. If a person is working overtime often, this cuts out any time for exercise or healthy meal-making. Health becomes less of a priority.

Working overtime contributes to our stress levels too. Acute and chronic stress manifests itself in our bodies with very real consequences to our health. Doctors agree that stress is a major contributor to many of our leading health problems today—depression, heart disease, diabetes, obsessive-compulsive and anxiety disorders, even cancers. In fact, it’s been estimated that as many as 90% of doctor’s visits are for symptoms that are at least partially stress-related!<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most tragic consequence of this work-centric paradigm that we’re subjected to is the fact that our relationships with loved ones are suffering. The chance of a marriage holding up “for better or worse” is almost less than half.<sup>9</sup> Those who are especially driven to succeed in the workplace now find themselves victims of social isolation disorders. Carl Thoresen, director of the Stanford University Master’s Degree Program in Health Psychology Education, called it the “getting ahead versus getting along” dilemma.<sup>10</sup> More and more, we find ourselves torn between this false dichotomy. Sometimes, it seems, success must come at the cost of our friendships.

In an age when we enjoy more physical comforts than most and our technologies allow us to do more than ever before, we also find ourselves pressured to do more—paradoxically, more than those who don’t enjoy our standard of living. Contrary to the assumption that our technological advances and high standard of living afford us a better quality of life, we find ourselves pressured to work more, and the consequences are manifesting themselves in our mental, emotional, and physical health.

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<sup>6</sup> Man in Adaptation: the cultural present. Yehudi Cohen, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> The Obesity Epidemic in Canada. Economics Division  
<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/prb0511-e.htm>

<sup>8</sup> “Stress: How It Affects Your Body, and How You Can Stay Healthier.” Elizabeth Scott, M.S.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/84f0213x/2005000/6500115-eng.htm>

<sup>10</sup> “Social isolation may be major predictor of cardiac disease.” Stanford News Release.  
<http://news.stanford.edu/pr/92/920630Arc2144.html>



## **Given the increasing pressures that come with providing for a family and loved ones,**

can we blame ourselves for prioritizing work so highly? Truly, the timecard to workaholism is punched with the very best of intentions.

Often these days, even when you do take time out for yourself in the form of a vacation with family or friends, you do not get the mental and physical relaxation that you need. More and more, vacations—those sanity-saving time-outs that we depend on each year—are becoming another source of stress.

Elizabeth Scott, M.S., has identified what she calls “summer stress”:<sup>11</sup> the unexpected stresses that come in the summer because of ever-present kids, vacation expectations, covering for co-workers, and a busier-than-usual social schedule. Scott points out that summer vacations often end up being more of a stressful experience than a relaxing one for a myriad of reasons. Making travel arrangements, coordinating schedules, being on the phone with airlines, making reservations, dealing with hotel vacancies and car rentals, packing, visiting with in-laws, and, if you have children, keeping everyone happy—it’s enough to prompt the desire for a vacation after your vacation! Moreover, Scott argues,

*“Today’s vacationing worker is much more likely to get a call from the office or from other people than in the days before computer access and cell phones, making it much more difficult to leave daily life behind—which is usually the whole point of going on a vacation!”*

Like an overcast sky on your beach day, these additional unexpected stresses can sneak into your vacations and undermine the whole purpose of the outing.

*“No man needs a vacation so much as the man who has just had one”—Elbert Hubbard*

Hubbard’s quote is especially true for people who have invested in a lake cottage or cabin for their second home. Going out to the cabin for a weekend isn’t so relaxing when you factor in the ongoing maintenance that has to be done on it every time you’re out there. Every vacation to the lake starts with the same list of chores: fill the water tank, sweep off the cobwebs, mow the grass, prepare the boat, and other time-consuming “not so fun” tasks. When you spend the weekend at the lake, you are really spending time doing chores instead of relaxing. This defeats the whole purpose of a vacation because you’re not taking time out and de-stressing. Instead, you’re working.

Another common drawback includes a feeling of obligation to visit that home for every vacation experience and the fact that costs are paid year-round regardless of usage. It’s more difficult to justify the expensive bills that show up on the second home when you haven’t been there very often. Second-home owners are typically disappointed when they actually only spend four to five weeks at their home per year, instead of the three to five months that they had originally planned.

To make a vacation worthwhile, people have to learn how to leave all of the stress and work behind; they have to separate themselves from it and turn their focus towards true rest and relaxation. Only then can they experience the true value of a “real” vacation.

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<sup>11</sup> “Secret causes of Summer Stress.” [http://stress.about.com/od/situationalstress/a/summer\\_stress.htm](http://stress.about.com/od/situationalstress/a/summer_stress.htm)



**So how can you take control of your life** and claim more time to devote to your own well-being? How can you do that without abandoning your career or your business ambitions altogether? Your desire to succeed and provide for your family is a valid one, and it should not come at such a cost. Yet, there's no easy solution: throwing in the towel and turning your back on society will only lead to a life in the forest with Luddites.

Our society is structured in such a way that the business executive often ends up at a fork in the road between personal fulfillment and professional success. There is, however, a way to avoid having to confront this dilemma altogether.

*“In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”—Benjamin Franklin*

Fortunately, a lot has changed since Ben Franklin uttered this fatalistic phrase. We have more control over our lives than we might realize; indeed, truly successful people know that they have it, and plot their path to success on their own terms.

*To be healthy, I need at least seven hours of sleep a night.*

*To be happy, I need to spend time with my family and friends.*

*To be motivated for work, I need to have time away from it so that I can come back refreshed and re-energized.*

The truly successful make physical, mental, and interpersonal health equally as important as the requirements for their professional goals. In fact, they understand that health—mentally and physically—is a requirement for success in the professional realm.

So what do we need to achieve mental and physical health? Study after study has told us that to get back to health, we simply need to get back to the basics: namely, sleep, exercise, and meaningful interactions with loved ones.



**Sleep—that crucial factor dictating the capacity and alertness of your mind** and serving as the guardian of your good moods—is something most of us only enjoy for five to six hours each night. No matter what Nabob or Folgers might suggest, caffeine cannot compete against a good night’s sleep as a remedy for stress, exhaustion, and irritability. Researchers<sup>12</sup> have also found that people who sleep less than seven hours per night are more likely to be overweight or obese. This is because a lack of sleep impacts the balance of hormones in the body that affect appetite.<sup>13</sup>

Physical health can also be greatly improved through regular exercise. Not only does exercise help us lose weight and maintain the strength required for an active lifestyle, but it’s also one of the best ways to reduce stress and tension. Anything from a vigorous run to a short walk instantly improves mood and reduces feelings of stress naturally. This is because, with exercise, our bodies produce more endorphins (nature’s feel-good hormones) that help lower cortisol (the stress hormone) levels.

Perhaps the most important factor contributing to overall health is something that people all over the world have intuitively known for centuries, and that science is lately beginning to confirm: spending time with loved ones is good for your health. A new psychology movement says the happiest people surround themselves with family and friends.<sup>14</sup> Feelings of social belonging increase each time we interact with loved ones, and when confronted with challenges, it’s those relationships that provide the support we need to get through them. People who lack these strong relationships to fall back on are often overcome by life’s challenges.

In reality, a list of reasons why physical and mental health are important factors to our success and happiness is not needed; we all know them intuitively because, at some point in our lives, we have experienced them. At one point or another, you’ve gone for a walk and found that your mood has lightened afterwards. There have been periods of your life when you were able to adhere to a regular and adequate sleeping schedule, and you noticed how refreshed and mentally alert you felt. On many occasions, you’ve spent quality time with loved ones and enjoyed the feelings of fulfillment that come from meaningful interactions.

The only question that remains then is, how can we repeat those moments? How can we make those times of mental and physical health—that balance between work and play—the norm, rather than the exception?

We can do this by shifting our perspectives.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://longevity.about.com/od/lifelongenergy/tp/healthy\\_sleep.htm](http://longevity.about.com/od/lifelongenergy/tp/healthy_sleep.htm)

<sup>13</sup> The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism. Vol. 89, No. 5.

<sup>14</sup> “Psychologists now know what makes people happy.” Marilyn Elias, USA TODAY. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2002-12-08-happy-main\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2002-12-08-happy-main_x.htm)



## **Why not death, taxes, and vacations?**

Why not make time for ourselves as much a certainty as that dreaded duo? Why don't we imbue family suppers with as much importance as we do that stakeholder meeting? Let's assign the same value to sleep, exercise time, and personal relationships as we do to board meetings, working lunches, and answering emails. Let's make vacations—the right kind of vacations—as much of a sure thing as monthly financial reports. At least this way, the regular routine is infused with intervals of play.

Essentially, that's all that it takes—a simple shift in perspective; because our technologies can, in fact, work for us, and not against us. We only need to realize that we are in the driver's seat when it comes to how we spend our days. This means that we can prioritize time off and time away as a necessary piece to the puzzle of happiness and personal fulfillment. When you arrange your schedule next month, why not schedule in a vacation (it doesn't need to be long), and assign it the same importance to your professional success as that webinar? A shift in perspective about the importance of personal time doesn't mean that we have to take a two-week holiday each month, and it certainly doesn't mean that our vacation expenses need to deplete our retirement savings.

There are those among us who have found a creative way to use vacations as an opportunity to fulfill both financial and personal needs. The truly savvy have found a way to turn vacations into an investment with financial returns as well as positive health returns. A private co-ownership model is a creative new concept that meets lifestyle and financial needs. Investing in these vacation properties can be ideal as they require minimal maintenance and preparation, and as such provide peace of mind for vacationers. The private co-ownership model also results in significant financial returns in the long run. The truly fantastic thing about a vacation (and investment) model like this is that it lends itself to a lifestyle that values health, leisure, and professional success equally.

As time off and away from work and the regular stresses of day-to-day living, vacations (specifically, the right kind of vacations) provide us with an opportunity to focus on our bodies, our minds, and our relationships, so that personal fulfillment and professional success can be realized in unison. Perhaps this has been the secret to our European counterparts' success.

We might not be able to change the way our society runs, but we can change the way we value personal well-being. If we acknowledge that health is a crucial component to professional success, then perhaps we'll discover more creative opportunities (like private co-ownership vacation models) that fulfill both lifestyle and financial goals.

Perhaps all Franklin needed to alleviate his gloomy perspective on life was a little time away with his family.

*“They talk of the dignity of work. Bosh. The dignity is in leisure.”* —Herman Melville



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