



BE SOMEONE WHO IS ENGAGED WITH WORK, NOT SOMEONE WHO AVOIDS WORK

I became aware of how prevalent this attitude is on a recent trip.

A few days ago I was on a flight from Los Angeles to Chicago, where I was going to attend a recruiting conference. When the flight took off, the stewardesses went around and served everyone drinks and then closed a curtain and took their seats in the back of the cabin. There they started discussing some airlines union and some events occurring in the aviation industry, and they were clipping coupons.

"Those pilots that lost their jobs and flew 100 miles past Minneapolis and forgot to land the plane...do you know what they were doing?" one stewardess asked the other.

"A friend who knows a stewardess that was on that plan told me they were surfing the Internet and that is why they did not notice where they were. They were so engrossed in the Internet."

"I heard the same thing."

There is Internet on many airplanes now, and from what I have heard, once the flight takes off, many pilots like to take out their notebook computers and start surfing the Internet. Based on this "inside information" I learned on the flight, apparently a couple of pilots had been more interested in surfing the Internet than they had been in flying a giant airplane, and they had hurtled past their destination at over 500 miles an hour. They had not even heard air traffic control for an hour. Apparently the situation became so serious that the air force had prepared to send fighter planes into the air, in order to intercept the airplane. This was all because the pilots were doing something other than their jobs.

There was a woman sitting next to me who overheard this conversation as well, because the stewardesses were speaking so loud:

"I have a friend who is an executive at Virgin Atlantic. He was traveling between between London and New York a few weeks ago and he got in trouble for not being logged in during the flight, and sleeping instead. They now expect their executives to be working during the flight if it is during business hours, not napping and enjoying themselves. Can you believe the nerve? He is so upset he is going to look for another job."

The woman seemed to be saying that she thought it was something of an "outrage" that people who were being paid while flying should also be expected to do work while in transit. Apparently, before there was Internet on airplanes, the executives who were flying around on company business could be *out of touch*, and no one would know whether they were working or not. Now, with Internet on airplanes, the executives can all be connected with their bosses and others with Instant Messenger, email and so forth, and they are expected to be working if they are flying during business hours. This woman essentially seemed to be upset that these executives were expected to both work *and* get paid for working.

For at least two hours, behind a curtain in the back of the airplane, the two stewardesses sat there clipping coupons and discussing the union, unfair working conditions and so forth. Since I was seated at the very back of the plane with them, I could hear their entire conversation, and all their gripes about management. I asked one of the stewardesses for a glass of water at one point during the flight and she sighed and put down a giant arrangement of coupons she had been working on. She then got up and continued talking to the other stewardess without saying a word to me, handed me the water and sat down again with her coupons.

I looked at the coupons she was clipping and noticed that she had put some major effort into the work. In fact, after being rudely handed my water, I realized that the two stewardesses were actually trading coupons:

"I do not eat cheese because I am lactose intolerant. Do you have anything you can trade me for this Kraft Cheese coupon?" one asked.

"Of course. Do you wear contacts or not? I have a coupon for contact lens solution," the other chimed in.

These two stewardesses had come to work with giant coupon collections to trade back and forth during their work. I could only assume that they were being paid while flying, and that they had coordinated turning the little airplane galley into their own personal trading post.

When I fly by carriers like Singapore Airlines, the stewardesses are circulating all the time. If they see someone who looks like they are trying to take a nap, they will offer a pillow or a blanket. If someone has finished a drink, they will offer a refill. They are constantly picking up trash, making sure the bathrooms are cleaned and more. In short, the stewardesses are engaged with their work, and even seem to like their jobs.

An airplane is a little ecosystem, and for the people who work there it is an office as well. However, the more I thought about it, the more I realized how many people out there simply are not doing their jobs, and are not grateful for the work that they have. Pilots surfing the Internet, stewardesses clipping coupons, executives being expected to work while flying—and everyone complaining about work, these are all examples of people who are not engaged with their work.

As I listened to the stewardesses talk, I could not help thinking that, instead of clipping coupons and complaining about their jobs while working, maybe they should have been doing their jobs. Maybe they should be grateful for the jobs that they have. In the course of the flight, I had encountered and learned about:

- pilots who were more concerned with surfing the Internet than flying an airplane,
 - an executive with a major airline [looking for a new job](#), because he is upset about being expected to work while flying during business hours,
 - two stewardesses who came to work to trade coupons and complain about their jobs,
 - a passenger next to me who was "outraged" that someone she knows who works at an airline is expected to both work and be paid at the same time.
- I filed this information away and then, when my airplane landed, I picked up my bags and went to get a hotel shuttle to the airport hotel. I arrived later in the evening on a Sunday, and the airport was very quiet. The shuttles were supposed to come by every 15 minutes. I stood outside in the cold for at least 25 minutes, next to where the hotel shuttle was supposed to pick me up. After 30 minutes or so, I called the hotel:

"It says the hotel shuttle is supposed to be here every 15 minutes," I told the front desk.

"Hold on," the front desk told me.

The front desk came back and explained that the shuttle driver said he had been there once already within the past 15 minutes and would be back in 15 more minutes.

"You must have just missed him the first time he was there, and then 'been distracted' and missed him the second time he was there," the front desk person informed me.

This did not make any sense, since I had been standing there for 30 minutes, and the shuttle theoretically should have come twice during this period of time.

Five minutes later the shuttle pulled up.

"I was right here 15 minutes ago!" the shuttle driver told me. He looked a little guilty and concerned.

"No you weren't," I told him. "This is a giant bus there is no way I could have missed you. I was standing right here."

The drive to the hotel was quiet. I realized that, since it was Sunday evening, the driver probably figured no one would be arriving and took a break or something while being paid, instead of swinging around to pick me up. I figured that the airport shuttle bus driver had figured out how to not work and be paid at the same time, just like everyone else seemed to want to do.

I have been driven around in these little airport shuttles with people who are enthusiastic about their jobs before. They chat with you and talk about the city you are visiting, local attractions, how busy the airport is and more. They grab your bags and help you put them in the shuttle. They welcome you to the city you are in, recommend restaurants and send you on your way, better off for having seen them. They are excited about their jobs and the work that they are doing.

When I got to the recruiting conference I was attending I went to several presentations. At a couple of the presentations, recruiters were discussing how social networking sites like LinkedIn, Facebook and so forth are really good tools for recruiting candidates. One recruiter got up and started talking about some incredible statistics regarding how much time the average worker spends on social networking Websites each day while at work. I do not remember how much time it was; however, it was at least an hour. The recruiter had a little graph that showed the amount of time and the number of people spending time on social networking sites, which is continually increasing as time goes on.

"Many employers have 'gotten wise' to this," one recruiter said. "They are now blocking people from using various social networking sites at work."

As I listened to this presentation, I started to think again about how many people are actually not doing work while they are at work. Instead of working, employers are dealing with the problem of people who are not doing their jobs, because they are busy screwing around on social networks. This seemed pretty amazing to me. The graphs I saw showed these statistics going up and up, as more and more people spend more and more time not working and, instead, screwing around.

The seminar I was attending lasted from Monday through Wednesday. There was an exhibit hall set up in a big auditorium for all sorts of companies that service the [recruiting industry](#). Some of the companies there were giant businesses that had sent employees to man the booths. Others were smaller companies of a few people, and the owner of the business was typically there with a few employees.

The conference ended around 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday. When I had arrived at the conference on Wednesday morning, however, I noticed that many of the exhibitors were already taking apart their booths. By 12:00 noon more than half of the exhibitors had completely taken down their booths. I noticed a pattern with all of this: The only exhibitors who had taken down their booths were large companies that had sent employees to the conference to exhibit. Smaller companies, the ones that seemed to be run and owned by only a few people, kept their exhibits up for as long as possible, until the conference was actually over.

What this showed me is that the employees of the larger companies were trying to get out of the conference as soon as possible, so they could avoid work. Since the owners of the smaller companies were at the conference, the employees of the smaller companies had no way to avoid working.

In these few days, I saw so many people avoiding work. All around us there are all sorts of people who are avoiding work and not carrying their weight, and then there are people out there who are doing the work. Which side of the equation are you on? You need to be engaged with the work you do and you should never, ever be avoiding work. If you find yourself avoiding work, then you are probably in the wrong job. Looking for reasons not to be productive, and distracting yourself with other things is a very bad sign.

More than the work not being what you want, though, there is another component that merits even more examination: That component is *YOU*. Your work and your satisfaction and engagement with your work will largely be a product of *how you see your work*. Do you see your work as good, or do you see it as bad?

When I was in college, I spent my first year in a dorm that was in the process of being scheduled for demolition, because it was so old and worn down. It had been built very cheaply and everyone used to talk about what a dump it was, how they did not want to be housed there and so forth. People used to complain about it constantly. When I found out that I had to spend my first year of college there, I had several choices: One, I could embrace it and get excited; or, Two, I could hate and despise it, like everyone else seemed to.

I made the decision to like the dorm. The dorm had a huge cavernous basement that people used to call "scary", and all sorts of similar things. I decided that this basement would make a great *running track* for me, and I ran around it all winter, whenever I wanted to exercise. I never had to go to the gym. I found tons of little things about this dorm to appreciate, and probably ended up being the only person who was truly sad to see the dorm go when it was finally demolished.

Everything is like this. Your job is how you choose to see it. You can look at your job and see it as bleak, or you can look at it as fun and exciting. You can choose to work and be engaged in what you do, or you can choose to avoid work and despise what you do.

The people I encountered on my trip, and all of the people out there who are consistently avoiding work will never amount to anything. This is not how you get ahead in the world—it is how you fall back and sink into a life and career marked by frustration, pain and negativity. These are the sorts of people who cause trouble for companies, who collectively force bankruptcies, who are the first to be laid off, and who have the most unsatisfying careers and lives. Be someone who is engaged with work, not someone who avoids work.

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