

How to Look Like a Workaholic in a 40-Hour Workweek

By Laura Stack

In a perfect world, we would be judged solely on our results, regardless of what others thought about *how* or *when* we got our work done. The good news is that this type of “results only” mentality is catching on. Some companies and managers are beginning to realize that there are better ways to manage performance than by counting hours at the office. Organizations are responding to the changing needs of workers everywhere by offering arrangements such as flex-time and telecommuting.

The bad news is that, like it or not, corporate mentality is what it is. The 40-hour week is not just an expectation; it’s the minimum, especially for salaried professionals. Self-proclaimed workaholics advertise their twelve hour days like a badge of honor and wouldn’t be caught dead leaving the office before 6:30.

Just because it’s the norm doesn’t make it right. Ready to take a stand? You don’t have to defy your boss and coworkers in a dramatic five o’clock showdown. Here are some practical ideas that can help you on your way to regaining control over your time.

Workaholics don’t get ahead. There will always be work that needs to be done. There will always be more to be done than there is time to do it. That’s why the classic workaholic will never get ahead. As they work to accomplish more and more, their task list will continue to grow. At the same time, as they become tired, stressed, and overextended, the quality of their work will suffer.

Frankly, the workaholic’s energies would be better spent finding ways to get more out of a forty-hour week than by burning the midnight oil five (or six, or seven) nights a week

Get noticed in eight hours. Unfortunately, workaholics exist for a reason. They tend to be well-respected for their efforts and praised for their dedication to their jobs. But that doesn’t mean that you need to smash the 50-hour barrier every week in order to command the recognition and respect that you deserve. This is where productivity comes in. When most people talk about workaholics, the discussion usually revolves around how much *time* they spend working. It is rare to get a clear idea of just how much these people accomplish in a given day.

Anybody can spend a day keeping busy. It takes real commitment to remain actively *productive* during working hours. Just keep in mind that real productivity pays off, big time. You don’t want to be noticed because you log a lot of hours. You want to be noticed for what you accomplish. And if you really are putting forth the effort necessary to milk your 40-hour week for all it’s worth, your stellar results will not go unnoticed.

The early bird gets...a raw deal. Let's say you work from eight until four while your boss works from ten until six. Which one of you is going to get noticed? Your ten to six boss can work the same amount of hours but still look like she's putting in extra hours at the end of the day. And if your boss works and extra hour or two, she's walking out of the building while the sun sets – another corporate rock star.

In general, workers tell me that staying late gets noticed and arriving early tends not to be. If you are the type that likes getting to the office first thing in the morning and heading out an hour or two before the crowd, it might take some attention to detail to make sure that you don't end up being penalized for having an early riser's schedule. Just make sure that your coworkers realize that while they are still at home in a bathrobe, you are at your desk, getting a head start on your day.

Handle your correspondence first thing in the morning. Your e-mail time-stamp might be the only way someone realizes that you don't just cut out in the late afternoon because you feel like it. When you leave early, you've earned it. Those that leave the office at six or seven at night will also be sure to notice that you have gotten back to them with an answer to their question before they've even managed to sit down at their desk the following day.

Get out the door on time. Make a commitment, even if it is only to yourself. Maybe you have to pick up the kids. Maybe you just have a standing early-evening date with the gym. Whatever it is, a regularly scheduled post-work obligation can do wonders for getting you out of the office at a reasonable hour. Block off the last half-hour of your schedule and don't hesitate to inform your coworkers when it's time for you to be on your way.

Have coworkers abide by your schedule. You shouldn't expect others to come and go at the same time you do. Generally, their schedule is their prerogative. You do, however, have the right to make sure that their schedule doesn't interfere with your ability to get work done. Make it clear that you expect to be out the door at a certain time each day, and stick to it. If you need a report in your hands by the end of the day, make sure that everyone knows that you mean the end of *your* day, not theirs.

Go the extra mile. Remember, all of this doesn't mean that we should be petty about watching the clock and focus only on making sure we're in the parking lot by 5:03. We've pretty well established that we don't want to make it a habit, but sometimes it is appropriate to put in a long day or week. It shouldn't become your standard mode of operation, but being able to come through in a pinch is a major asset in the business world. Valuing your time is a good thing, but if the demands of the job call for being a

little late for dinner every once in a while, it is okay to step up to the plate. Just make sure that it's the exception, not the rule.

© 2009 Laura Stack. Laura Stack is a personal productivity expert, author, and professional speaker who helps busy workers Leave the Office Earlier® with Maximum Results in Minimum Time®. She is the president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., a time management training firm specializing in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations. Since 1992, Laura has presented keynotes and seminars on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces. She is the bestselling author of three works published by Broadway Books: *The Exhaustion Cure* (2008), *Find More Time* (2006) and *Leave the Office Earlier* (2004). Laura is a spokesperson for Microsoft, 3M, and Day-Timers®, Inc and has been featured on the CBS Early Show, CNN, and the New York Times. Her clients include Cisco Systems, Sunoco, KPMG, Nationwide, and 3M. To have Laura speak at your next event, call 303-471-7401. Visit www.TheProductivityPro.com to sign up for her free monthly productivity newsletter.