



# GIVE ME A BREAK 9

## *a nation overworked*

BEING 'MERICAN MEANS being a hard worker, thank you very much. We pull ourselves up by our sweaty, star-spangled bootstraps, and we take pride in earning what we have. The problem is we've forgotten about something called *balance*. We may think working less is only for swashbucklers, but global stats show we're leading the world in too many honest days' work – to our detriment.



### AMERICA, LAND OF TOIL

**Labor hours.** Americans log the most work hours in the industrialized world, while at least 134 countries mandate a maximum workweek (nope, not us). According to an August Gallup poll, the American 40-hour workweek is a thing of the past (try closer to 50), and the office even comes home with us on evenings and weekends. How does that stack up with other countries? According to Vox, a website that publishes research-based policy analysis, 32% of Americans work 45 or more hours per week, compared with only 18% of employees in Germany and 4% in France.

**Paternity and maternity leave.** The U.S. offers the least protected paternity leave out of all industrialized countries (compare Poland's four years to our 12 weeks). The U.S. is one of only two countries in the world without paid maternity leave. Even countries like Afghanistan offer 90 days off with 100% pay.

**Vacation and sick days.** While vacations reverse stress-induced health problems and increase our general wellbeing, according to *Psychology Today*, the U.S. doesn't provide paid holidays and vacations, unlike all other "rich" countries. Get the stomach flu? Sorry, no American federal law requires paid sick days.

### WORK 'TIL YOU DROP

Here's the thing: Buying into our overworked, stressed-out culture has serious consequences, from headaches to life-threatening diseases like heart disease. According to the World Health Organization, 35% of work-related stress cases result in mental health problems. What's more, no sick leave means Americans tend to drag ourselves to the office and spread the snotty love.

The U.S. leads the world with the highest GDP, and that might be the exchange we've made. However, even that's not the whole

story. To gauge productivity, analysts divide that GDP by the total number of annual labor hours. While the U.S. GDP per labor hours was \$60 in 2011, countries like France – notorious for its short work days and generous vacations – weren't far behind at \$57, according to *Fortune*. So it's not necessarily how long a country works but how smart.

“...NO SICK LEAVE MEANS AMERICANS TEND TO **DRAG OURSELVES TO THE OFFICE AND SPREAD THE SNOTTY LOVE.**”

### GIVE ME A BREAK

What's a working hand to do? We need paychecks, darn it, and sometimes we do what we have to. But don't be afraid to take a hard look at our beleaguered nation and set boundaries.

Negotiate more leave days in your contract (some employees even prioritize these benefits over raises). Refrain from taking work home, and protect your weekends. Save for vacations, even if it's camping during a three-day weekend. Evaluate your priorities and where you are in your career: Can you afford to pass on a special project or plum assignment? At the least, take regular lunch breaks, unwind, and for Pete's sake, don't check your work email.

We get it: It's the American way to toughen up. After all, what's a measly extra 10 hours a week? Well, after 40 years, that adds up to 10 extra years flanked by water coolers, that's what. Do the math.

Maybe it's time to call it a day, troops. \$

SOURCES: abcnews.com, psychologytoday.com, gallup.com, nytimes.com, pewresearch.org, ilo.org, cepr.net, dol.gov, usatoday.com, theatlantic.com, apa.org, who.int, forbes.com, huffingtonpost.com, voxeu.org, knoema.com