



# The Eight-Hour Work Day – Says who?

Written by Stephenie Gettier

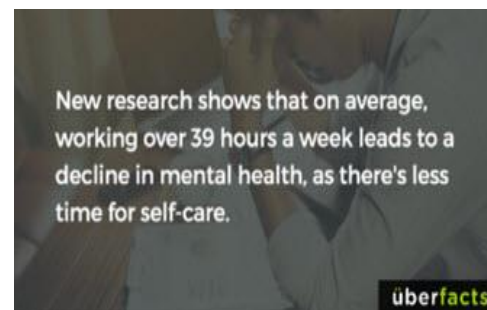
April 25, 2019

Have you ever wondered where the minimum eight-hour workday came from? Or, did you just never give it a second thought? This is a question I had honestly never really contemplated. I mean, everyone was working those hours with no consideration whatsoever. All corporate jobs I applied to, and every company I went to work for, made it clear the “core hours were from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm”. If the hours weren’t the standard 8-5, they were some eight-hour variation, like 9:00 am to 6:00 pm. I just thought, that was a typical day in the office. I was working it like so many other people in Corporate America. I even worked for some organizations that required you physically be in the office for nine-hours a day to cover an hour lunch break rather you took it or not. They didn’t give you the option to leave early if you opted not to take a shorter lunch break or none at all. Keep in mind, that didn’t include your commute time to get back and forth to the job. So, let’s add approximately another hour to your day, if you’re lucky enough to work only a half-hour or less from the office, and aren’t sitting in traffic. Which is highly unlikely considering a good portion of the working population arrives and leaves around these times.

It became very clear over time, not even an eight-hour day was sufficient to complete a never-ending day’s work. Therefore, I began to question where does the eight-hour a day mentality come from? Who created this requirement? I was shocked to find out that initially, back in the Industrial Revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, employees were required to work 10-16 hours a day. This was due to factories “needing” to be run 24/7. Almost a century later in 1914, the eight-hour a day movement was born. It was implemented by Henry Ford to create a more humane workday. Not only did he cut hours, but he doubled the pay. This idea was promoted by Welsh activist Robert Owen who was an advocate for shorter workdays.

What I thought was interesting, is workdays went from 10-16-hours per day to eight-hours per day because the higher hours were believed to be inhumane. However, here we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century back to working the inhumane 10-16-hour workdays. Why would we go back to working this way?

One of the first things that come to my mind is the “this is the way we have always done it” mentality or the “definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result” or maybe just the result of unrealistic expectations and demands. I would say all apply considering the mass amounts of data and



research showing people are less productive after three-hours a day. In addition to the negative health effects

of sitting for extended periods of time, long work hours, and high levels of stress and demands which have been proven to be contributing factors of chronic disease. Yet with all the facts and statistical data that have and continue to be presented, we persist with this toxic behavior.

What do companies think they are accomplishing by working people this way? Do these business leaders somehow think the stats are wrong or do they just not care? I believe it is more of the later. I’ve been in enough organizations and spoke to enough senior leaders who know their working environments are far from healthy. However, they chose to do nothing about it because they have the “this is the way we’ve always done it” mentality or because the business owners and executive leadership

don't support it. They think the way they are running their operations is getting the job done and see no reason to change. Keep in mind, they most likely haven't surveyed their workforce to find out if it is truly working and providing the best return on their investment. Further, if they have surveyed the workforce, they have chosen to do nothing with the data.

If they took the time to understand how this mindset is affecting their business, and how much they are losing on the backend as a result, maybe they would take the steps necessary to make these dire changes. The hundreds of thousands of dollars they are losing could be used to add additional resources, training, and technology which would allow for more efficient and effective operations. This would enable employees to get done more in shorter periods of time and deliver more quality work and turnaround times. Additionally, it would also reduce missed time from work due to stress related illnesses, job turnover, and use of employer paid medical care and sick leave.

As a culture, we have created this catastrophic disaster. We want more and faster with less resources to accommodate the demand. The question is why? Why do we always have to have it now? Why does it have to be accommodated at that very moment? This mentality in many ways has set us up for failure because we are constantly striving to meet these unrealistic demands. When we don't meet them, we are made to feel we somehow fell short or are lacking in skills and competencies. Therefore, we stress ourselves out working harder and longer to do better as we fear if we don't, we will lose our jobs.

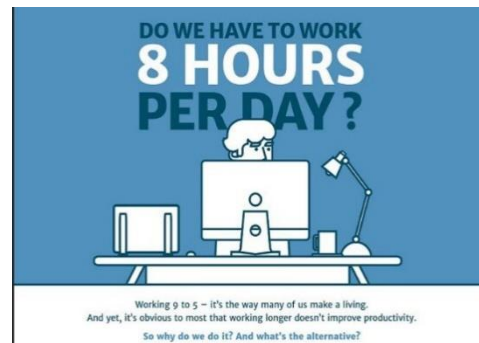
Yes, there are some things that must be done by a certain date, like filing your taxes or closing yearend, but those dates never change from year to year and should be planned for accordingly. It may require better organization, processes, technology, and/or being better staffed to handle the demand so long hours aren't necessary. This mentality should be equally applied when projects and requests are not planned or come-up unexpectedly. There are going to be those times when an emergency arises that you just cannot avoid, and it needs to be done now. Those should be rare and not everyday occurrences. If they are happening frequently, that needs to be evaluated. Management needs to find out why as this is an issue of concern, and a breakdown somewhere within the business operations.

What I have found to be the reasons employees are working excess hours, *is* due to lack of organization,

processes, technology, staffing, support, unrealistic demands, deadlines and expectations, and non-quality vendors. We need to slow down and take a breath, and really ask ourselves when making demands, why I need it, and is my expectation for the turnaround time to complete the request realistic based on the current state of support? We as a culture are creating this, and then asking the question "how did we get here?". We are the root cause of the problem and must take steps to rethink how we are working because it's time for a change.

We have morphed this "got to have it now, no matter how long it takes, or what we have to sacrifice" mindset monster. If we as a culture shift this destructive thinking, we change the way we work and live in a more productive and healthy way.

Organizations and companies need to do their homework and restructure their workforce to work smarter not harder. They need to judge them on results and not facetime, and they need to allow people to work where



and during the timeframes they are most creative and productive. The 8-5 in the office mentality is no longer suitable. The mindset of

these business leaders is like old technology – it's obsolete and no longer supports the age we live and work in. It never did, but it was a behavior and thinking that was allowed and tolerated without much, if any, regard to the consequences employees would have to pay as a result. ■