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Workin' 9 to 9

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It's confession time. I write a column about technology and daily life, but I don't own a home computer.

Okay, okay ... I do own a 1998 **Toshiba Satellite** laptop, and used it for years, but it's a worthless antique as far as technology is concerned. Anyway, I usually spend most of my day planted in front of my PC at work.

But now that I find myself thinking up my best story ideas outside the office, I will rechristen my home with a desktop and a cable Internet connection. Then I can work around the clock.

It sounds like a joke as I write this, but I'm tinged with that work ethic that Europeans with gilded vacation packages see as the strength and the downfall of those hectic, harried Americans. And it's not just me. A **new report** from **Office Team** says advances in technology, particularly in the mobile variety, will result in more Americans working longer hours.

News.com provided this excerpt from the report that cannot be promising for people who already confuse the words "job" and "life": "With the proliferation of wireless technology, staff will be expected to remain in close contact with the office while they're away," the report said. "Eighty-six percent of executives surveyed said workers would be more connected to the office while on vacation in the future."

"In the future office, there will be added pressure to adapt quickly to change, work smarter, increase productivity and perform duties outside of one's job description," said **Diane Domeyer**, executive director of the Menlo Park, Calif.-based staffing firm. "The good news is that emerging technological tools and educational opportunities will better enable professionals to meet these challenges."

This is good news?

I touched on this subject a little more than a week ago when I brought up **Juliet Schor's** book, "The Overworked American," in which she wrote that labor-saving devices, especially the ones created for housewives of the 1950s, produced a generation of people who worked twice as hard to accomplish twice as much in half the time.

Some labor save. Instead of millions of people discovering more leisure time thanks to technological advances, we just kicked into high gear and did the warmer nations a favor by importing more coffee beans.

The Office Team study also makes this profound conclusion: "Companies/employees take a new view on work/life balance -- People may put in more time, but they will do so using tools that provide more control over their schedules and enable them to better balance priorities. There will

be an increasingly blurred line between work and other activities; people will need to multitask to meet all of their obligations efficiently."

That's fine if you thrive on pressure. For others, it's unhealthy. And for what it's worth, it is not a "new view." Its biggest fans lived during the past 250 years: **Henry Ford**, the robber barons and the creators of the Industrial Revolution. Today's technological revolution might look cleaner because a white-collar workforce doesn't kill itself by choking coal dust, but making it easier to work all the time only makes life harder.

I can save readers the trouble of writing (though I encourage you to respond all the same) by airing the rebuttal: But Robert, this is the way the world works. What are you going to do? Require people to stop work? If you are motivated and want to get ahead, then you have to work harder to distinguish yourself. On a deeper economic level, what kind of socialist are you to suggest that we choose to hobble our brilliant economic machine?

Well, it's why I'm caving in to the home computer. I have to do it to stay in the game. But on the larger level, I like the idea that the quality of our products and services, not the time spent on them, determines success. They are not always contingent on each other.

We have great technology that lets us do things we only dreamed about a few years ago, but once in a while wouldn't it be nice to really get away from it all?

The Sweet Smell of Success

Wayport Inc. of Austin plans to test its wireless Internet service at **International House of Pancakes** locations. The Austin American-Statesman wrote that 70 IHOPs in the 1,200-strong chain will host **Wayport's WiFi** system. The company's network already powers similar zones in 9,000 locations, including thousands of **McDonald's** restaurants, more than 800 hotels and 12 large airports, the paper said.

Many people are interested in checking out WiFi networks, but the plans offered by **Starbucks**, McDonald's and other businesses could be rather confusing for the non-geek. Many places charge for their access, and some even offer zones from different Internet service providers with differing prices and packages. USA Today put it like this: "Dozens of companies popped up, mostly small firms with funny names such as **Boingo Wireless** or **Pronto Networks**. That was confusing. Businesses didn't know who to buy equipment from. Consumers found themselves signing up for multiple WiFi services as they moved between coffee shops, airports and hotels."

The paper said consolidation is changing this: "Giant tech companies are leading the charge. This month, software maker **McAfee** acquired **Wireless Security**. In March, networking giant **Cisco Systems**, which earlier bought WiFi gear maker **Linksys**, acquired **Airespace**. Electronics-maker **Siemens** recently purchased **Chantry Networks**. Smaller companies are merging, too. Last week, struggling equipment maker **Proxim** agreed to be acquired by **Moseley Associates**, a maker of radio systems, for \$21 million. WiFi carrier **Wireless Broadband Access** recently merged with rival **Global Triad**, chipmaker **Chipcon** merged with **Figure 8 Wireless**, and equipment maker **Pegasus Wireless** merged with **Blue Industries**."

If enough local governments keep adding WiFi zones, this problem could be rendered moot. The Starbucks down the street from where I live in Alexandria offers a wireless zone where I could pay almost \$10 for a day of access. From the front window, however, I can see a little 14-pound transponder in the shape of a space invader perched atop the stoplight on King Street. Rather than paying Starbucks, why not get it for free from the city?

Feed the World, Dude

Live 8-benefit concert organizer **Bob Geldof** didn't react well to auction firm **eBay**'s initial refusal to stop sellers from hawking tickets to the upcoming shows. Live 8 organizers distributed tickets for the London Hyde Park show through a giant text-messaging contest, but many of the tickets wound up on eBay going for thousands of pounds. eBay canceled the auctions after Geldof excoriated them in the press.

Random Access readers, in turn, unleashed heavy artillery on Geldof:

- **John Hanson** from Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada: "These transactions are simply exchanges between someone who values the money more than the concert and someone who values the concert over the money. To judge this as exploitation is to judge individual values and capitalism as such. It was likely more harmful to entice the poor to waste 1.50 pounds on a text message for a 7.28 percent chance of winning, given that people also had to own a text messaging device. [Geldof] should have just given the damn things away if he cared so much about the poor."
- **W.F. Paez** of Saginaw, Mich., said the situation confuses him: "I'm not sure I understand Geldof's logic. On one hand, he's trying to shame the leaders of these eight nations into giving up the fruits of their free-market labor to corrupt African nations, yet when they do the activity that makes that very same fruit, he whines, moans and, as if to emphasize his opinion with some sort of puerile punctuation, spouts off a few expletives for all the world to read and hear."
- **Steve Glazer**, whereabouts unknown despite my best attempts to find out, edited one of my clumsier constructions: "There really needs to be a moratorium on the use of the phrase 'the likes of.' It means resembling, similar to, LIKE the persons named. So when you write that the Live 8 concert will feature 'the likes of **Paul McCartney, Snoop Dogg, U2, Sting and Madonna**,' you're literally saying that it will feature performers resembling those. Perhaps a U2 tribute band? Your pal, The likes of Steve."

Bono impersonators? Isn't one more than enough?

How to Steal a Million

I have received plenty of feedback from readers who loathe our 24-7 **iPod** coverage. Several wonder whether **Steve Jobs** is paying my rent. That's doubtful as long as **Melinda Gates** sits on **The Washington Post Co.**'s board of directors, but let's get to the point: How can we avoid iPods when it turns out that they multi-task better than we do?

Here's the latest example: Anti-fraud experts in Great Britain say iPods are becoming the corporate insider's primary means of data theft, the *Guardian* reported.

"In one case a recruitment agency found much of its client database had been copied to an iPod's memory and used to defraud the firm," the paper wrote. "Staff who have been given the sack or missed out on promotions are the most likely to turn to this type of fraud. They may be supported by criminal gangs who use employees as insiders to extract information, but in these cases they are more likely to be disgruntled employees who want to punish their employer."

This provides a whole new aspect to the name **Thievery Corporation**.

Send links and comments to robert.macmillan@washingtonpost.com.