

## Session 4: Work and Leisure: "Characters in Search of a Plot"

### Prior Reading

*Having read through a portion of Slouka's essay and an excerpt from The Art of Happiness at Work, what stands out to you? Was there a particular line or idea, maybe even a key word for you? Was there a story that sticks with you? Was there something that gave you pause?*

Excerpt from Mark Slouka, "Quitting the Paint Factory"

Excerpt from Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler, *The Art of Happiness at Work*

### Quotes

*Read through the following quotes, selecting a few of the ones that most appeal to you. Reflect on what they say to you and why you selected those particular quotes.*

"Most middle-class Americans tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship. As a result, their meanings and values are distorted. Their relationships disintegrate faster than they can keep them in repair and their lifestyles resemble a cast of characters in search of a plot."

-Gordon Dahl

"We have made a virtue out of the pursuit of material self-interest: indeed, this very pursuit now constitutes whatever remains of our sense of collective purpose. We know what things cost but have no idea what they are worth."

-Tony Judt

"People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall."

-Thomas Merton

"To be able to fill leisure intelligently is the last produce of civilization."

-Bertrand Russell

"As the level of wealth has doubled or tripled in the last fifty years in many industrialized nations, the levels of happiness and satisfaction with life that people report have not changed, and depression has actually become more common."

-Jonathan Haidt

"I live by the truth that 'No' is a complete sentence. I rest as a spiritual act."

-Anne Lamott

"Everybody worships something. And workism is among the most potent of the new religions competing for congregants."

-Derek Thompson

“One can live magnificently in this world, if one knows how to work and how to love, to work for the person one loves and to love one’s work.”

-Leo Tolstoy

“It will be said that, while a little leisure is pleasant, men would not know how to fill their days if they had only four hours of work out of the twenty-four.”

-Bertrand Russell

“Certainly, we are mostly better off than the average European peasant in the 1600s. But we do, in general, work longer hours.”

-Celeste Headlee

“Why should we make those best of friends, body and soul, part company?”

-Flavius Josephus

“It is a remarkable paradox that, at the pinnacle of human material and technical achievement, we find ourselves anxiety-ridden, prone to depression, worried about how others see us, unsure of our friendships, driven to consumer and with little or no community life.”

-Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

“There is a paradox at the heart of our lives. Most people want more income and strive for it. Yet at Western societies have got richer, their people have become no happier.”

-Richard Layard

“Eight hours’ labor, eight hours’ recreation, eight hours’ rest.”

-Robert Owen

“Idleness so called, which does not consist in doing nothing, but in doing a great deal not recognized in the dogmatic formularies of the ruling class, has as good a right to state its position as industry itself.”

-Robert Louis Stevenson

“We lack the density to stay put even in the mildest of breeze from our news feeds.”

-Alan Jacobs

“This is the philosophical underpinning of all our modern stress: that time is too valuable to waste. We don’t pass time, we spend it. It’s no wonder that we don’t really have pastimes anymore.”

-Celeste Headlee

“Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.”

-Cyril Northcote Parkinson

“There is more to life than increasing its speed.”

-Gandhi

“It might help if I go ahead and tell you what I think is the truth of your spiritual identity....  
Actually, I don't have a clue. I do know you are not what you look like, or how much you weigh,  
or how you did in school, or whether you start a job next Monday or not.”

-Anne Lamott

“A lot of people will disagree with my next statement, to the point of anger and outrage:  
Humans don't need to work in order to be happy.”

-Celeste Headlee

“We work to have leisure, on which happiness depends.”

-Aristotle

“You have got me walking up and down all day under those trees, saying to me over and over  
again, "Solitude, solitude." And You have turned around and thrown the world in my lap. You  
have told me, "Leave all things and follow me," and then You have tied half of New York to my  
foot like a ball and chain. You have got me kneeling behind that pillar with my mind making a  
noise like a bank. Is that contemplation?”

-Thomas Merton

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”

-Annie Dillard

“He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering  
commerce, of being yoked to toil.”

-Abraham Joshua Heschel

“In *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), the Lilliputians decide that Gulliver consults his watch so often that  
it must be his god.”

-Carl Honoré

“The whole struggle of life is to some extent a struggle about how slowly or how quickly to do  
each thing.”

-Sten Nadolny

“I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the  
world. This makes it hard to plan the day.”

-E. B. White

“Instead of saying ‘Don't just sit there; do something’ we should say the opposite, ‘Don't just do  
something; sit there.’”

-Zen master

“Vocation does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening.”

-Parker Palmer

“There are two ways to be rich: one is to have a lot of money; the other is to have few needs.”

-William Sloane Coffin

“You’ve heard this before, but the holy thing inside you really is that which causes you to seek it. You can’t buy it, lease it, rent it, date it, or apply for it. The best job in the world can’t give it to you.”

-Anne Lamott

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

-Arundhati Roy

“There’s a guy in this coffee shop sitting at a table, not on his phone, not on a laptop, just drinking coffee, like a psychopath.”

-Jason Gay

"More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews."

-Ahad Ha'am

“Love turns work into rest.”

-Teresa of Avila

“To be, in a word, unborable.... It is the key to modern life. If you are immune to boredom, there is literally nothing you cannot accomplish.”

-David Foster Wallace

“What do you want to be when you grow up? What a loaded question to ask children.... Using *what* and *be* together implies our job is synonymous with who we are.”

-Heidi Barr

“Work is love made visible.”

-Khalil Gibran

“As we become more obsessed with succeeding, or at least surviving, in that world, we lose touch with our souls and disappear into our roles.”

-Parker Palmer

“You must get your living by loving, or at least half your life is a failure.”

-Henry David Thoreau

**Questioning and Wrestling (Q and W)**

*The first list below names some of the larger questions we will wrestle with in our session. There are also questions posted from the readings we did in advance. Take a few moments to reflect on these in preparation for group discussion. The other questions listed will make more sense after the plenary session.*

### **Living the Questions**

What's the difference between understanding yourself as human being vs. human doing? Can your life be defined outside of your occupation? Do you find your work meaningful? Is rest what you do after work, or work what you do when not resting? What is the difference between recreation and rest? How does your social location affect your answers to these questions?

### **Mark Slouka Reading**

What do you make of idleness accomplishing something for society, that sitting still to contemplate is a lost art? Have you been in conversations where people brag about their workload? How do you think of work in relation to leisure? What messages are you constantly receiving about work? About leisure? What does it say that a person might have to fake a breakdown to find a different rhythm of life, a slower pace?

### **Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler Reading**

How would you describe your employment regarding the three categories (job, career, calling)? What is your attitude toward the work you do/did? What do you think qualifies as a higher purpose in one's work? If money were no object, would you continue to work? If money were no object, what kind of work would you prefer?

### **Work and Leisure**

Do we work in order to have leisure, or does leisure come first? If leisure is first, is that so we will be better workers? What are human beings for?

### **It Comes from the Greek(s)**

What do you make of leisure originally meaning a school of contemplation? What role does contemplation play in your life?

### **The Demise of Leisure in America**

In what ways has technology made life easier? Do we work less or simply have more access to work from everywhere? Do you use all your vacation days? Why do we tend to favor work over leisure?

### **The DNA Helix**

Does leisure exist that we might be better workers? What is the role of leisure?

### **The Gift of Slowing Down**

Religious or not, what do you think about Sabbath rest? Do you observe such a thing in your own life? How so? Why is it that the first thing we do upon waking is check the time? Are you capable of doing one thing at a time?

### **That Sounds Fun**

What did you most enjoy doing as a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader on a lazy Saturday afternoon? What is there to keep us from reclaiming that part of our lives as adults?

### **Modern Notions of Work**

How do you think of your work? Does it bring out the best in you? Does it give you purpose?

### **Americans and Their Work**

How would you rate your own job satisfaction level? What are Sunday nights and Monday mornings like for you?

### **Two Sides of Work**

If you only worked four hours a day, or six months a year, what would you do with that extra time? Can you even imagine such a life? How do you view retirement? What is it for? What is life for? When was the last time you reflected deeply on your work? What do you make of the distinction between work and vocation?

### **Work and Life**

How do you think of the relation between work and play? When was the last time you reflected deeply on your work? Can you imagine rekindling your relationship with your work? How would you describe your current stage of work? Could you imagine yourself apart from your current work?

### **Job or Vocation**

What do you make of the distinction between job and vocation? How would you describe your current employment in this regard? If you could do anything for a living, what would it be?

### **Jeske's Alternative Views of Work**

If asked to draw figures from the dot to the star of happiness, what would you draw? What is your image for success and meaning in work?

### **Suggested Further Reading**

*If you decide to read more on the topic of work and leisure, here are some suggested titles.*

Celeste Headlee, *Do Nothing*

Carla Honoré, *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed*

Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler, *The Art of Happiness at Work*

Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*