



TAKE BACK YOUR TIME
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NEWSLETTER - April/May 2008

None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.

-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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BREAKING NEWS

NEW PEW POLL CONFIRMS TAKE BACK YOUR TIME'S MISSION

A new poll released on April 9, 2008 by the Pew Research Center confirms the validity of Take Back Your Time's mission. The poll can be found at:

<http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/706/middle-class-poll>

The poll finds that middle-class Americans place "having more free time" ahead of all other priorities.

FROM THE POLL:

Asked to weigh their priorities in life, the middle class puts time ahead of wealth -- and everything else.

Some two-thirds (68%) of middle class respondents say that "having enough free time to do the things you want" is a very important priority in their lives. That's more than say the same about any other priority we asked about in this survey including: having children (62% said that is very important), being successful in a career (59%), being married (55%), living a religious life (53%), doing volunteer work/donating to charity (52%); and being wealthy (12%). Upper and lower class respondents give essentially the same answers. The demographic groups most inclined to say they highly value free time are the ones least likely to have it -- such as the employed, the middle-aged, and mothers of young children. In recent years, a number of public opinion surveys have documented Americans' growing sense of feeling rushed, and this perception tracks with the growth in the number of [mothers who are employed outside the home](#) and in the number of [two-earner couples](#). However, recent research on whether Americans in fact have less leisure time has produced mixed findings. At least one major report, which relied on five decades of time use logs kept by different groups of survey respondents, found that no matter what most people may perceive, Americans today have more leisure time now than they did several decades ago.^[5] Other reports find that many middle class families have maintained their lifestyle only by becoming two-earner households, with all the attendant time stresses.^[6]

We don't want to say, "We told you so!" but we did, and have been since 2002! Now if our leaders will just take this poll seriously!

JOE ROBINSON HAS STORY IN SIERRA MAGAZINE

Take Back Your Time board member Joe Robinson has an excellent article on family vacations in the May/June issue of SIERRA, the magazine of the Sierra Club. You can read it at:

<http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/200805/vacation.asp>

SIERRA magazine has also asked its readers to submit their favorite family vacation stories. Read some of them at:

<http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/familyvacation/>

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY FROM MOMSRISING.ORG!

Check out this wonderful animated greeting card from our friends at MomsRising.org!

<http://www.momsrising.org/flash/momsday2008.swf>

Send the card to everyone you know, and congratulations to MomsRising for their terrific work on behalf of family leave, sick leave, childcare, health care for children and so many other important things that can make life better for American families!

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - JOHN DE GRAAF

The Take Back Your Time paid vacation campaign is heating up in advance of this summer's vacation season. Backed by the findings in the Pew Poll mentioned above, I'll be traveling to Washington DC May 9-13 to try to drum up support for Take Back Your Time's paid vacation legislation and for our proposed NATIONAL VACATION MATTERS SUMMIT.

I'll be meeting with more than a dozen people, including staff members for US Senators, leaders from the travel industry, economists, leaders of non-profit organizations and researchers from prominent think tanks, promoting the legislation and the Summit and hearing their ideas about moving both forward.

I've been hearing from many people who want to help build the Summit to bring together all the stakeholders who believe that the Pew Poll is right and that Americans need more time, especially vacation time. If you want to help, please email me: jodg@comcast.net.

We've gotten a huge number of new signer/endorsers to our Public Policy Agenda. We'll print them all in the next newsletter.

Together we can win!

John de Graaf

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR - KELLEY SMITH

In-Between World: Way of the Future or Pipe Dream?

Having been both a career woman and a stay-at-home mom, I have always felt many of us are looking for an "in-between" lifestyle. Most employment policies are something of an all-or-nothing deal requiring fifty to sixty hours away from home. Employees who want more family time, and thus opt for part-time work, must forego health insurance and other valuable benefits. That leaves many of us still looking.

When I heard the term "phased retirement" recently on a radio talk show, I was intrigued. Phased retirement is a policy allowing people nearing retirement age to reduce their work hours gradually over a period of years - an in-between solution.

So, I would like to hear from people who have experience with the phased retirement policy. Is it something that works well? Do you feel squeezed from both sides and long for either full-time employment or full-time retirement? Are your employer's expectations reasonable? Does it appear this policy is available only to a few though huge numbers of aging workers would like to try it?

Let me hear from you.

Kelley Smith
editor@timeday.org

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CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE TAKE BACK YOUR TIME BOARD

From Board Member Cecile Andrews, author of *Slow is Beautiful: New Visions of Community, Leisure, and Joie de Vivre* and *Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life*.

Beyond the Ten Tips of Simplicity

I've been involved with the Simplicity movement for many years, and a few years ago, many of us involved in the movement met to forge the Take Back Your Time campaign. The Simplicity movement tends to focus on personal change and we knew we needed policy changes that did something about our long working hours. It's very difficult to live simply when you're working all the time! So in the past few years many of us have worked on the time issue, and I, myself have focused on exploring the idea of "the Slow Life," a life in which we have time for the important things, a life in which we move at a leisurely enough pace to appreciate them.

But lately I've been getting a lot of calls from the press asking me about Simplicity. Obviously, the crumbling economy is prompting their interest. However, they soon tire of talking to me when they find out I own a car and a television.

Even though I tell them that I have no microwave or dishwasher, they're still not interested in talking! They want to talk to someone who has no refrigerator, someone who cooks on a camp stove, someone who has no furniture but pillows.

Thus does the press continue to distort the idea of Simplicity. In order to get people's attention, they exaggerate and create distasteful stereotypes. So how should we respond to the media? Is there a way to talk about Simplicity in a substantive manner?

For instance, the media always wants to dumb Simplicity down. Instead of showing it as an age old philosophy, they always want 10 tips —10 (preferably short) ways to simplify. I usually scrape up at least five, but I always feel bad because I think this kind of "simplifying" undermines the essence of the Simplicity philosophy: I've always thought of Voluntary Simplicity as the "examined life." It's asking what's important and what matters. It's stripping away the inessential so we have space for the essential. It's looking at the consequences of our behaviors in terms of their effect on the well being of people and the planet and resisting the manipulations of the consumer society.

So there's no "recipe" for simplicity. It's a process of making conscious choices. Therefore, each person's life of simplicity differs. But there is one common approach we share: we question the amount of time we spend at the workplace. And many of us have found extra time by cutting back on our consumerism. We spend less so we can work less and have time for the things that matter to us.

But even though we "work" less, we're often still caught up in the frantic rush of American life. We still fill our days to the brim, leaving ourselves little time to just sit and do nothing. We're still busy all of the time. We tell ourselves it's OK because we're trying to save the world, but we're still too frantic to leave ourselves time to move slowly and experience life joyfully.

Ultimately, the only way we will change our consumer society is if we take time to stop and think. We'll only attract people to this movement if they feel they can live more joyfully. So that means we must do it ourselves. We must take time for leisure so we can think and feel deeply.

This is why the Take Back Your Time Vacation campaign is important to the Simplicity Movement. Vacations are one of the last places where people can lie around and do nothing and not feel guilty about it! I worry that as vacations continue to disappear we'll lose the ability to slow down and ponder life's questions. We'll lose the ability to see through the manipulation by the press and demagogues. We'll lose the ability to converse with others and think for ourselves. We'll be robots totally controlled by the media.

So now that the economy has prompted the media to explore the idea of Simplicity, let's try to resist reducing Simplicity to ten tips or miserly stereotypes. Let's show people how to take some of that time we've saved and move slowly and enjoy, even if it looks like we're doing nothing.

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HAPPENINGS

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON STUDENTS' PROJECT PROMOTES TAKE BACK YOUR TIME'S VACATION CAMPAIGN

By Katrina Mendoza

University of Washington students Kristin Clute, Becky Alexander, Megan Martin, and Katrina Mendoza designed and created the project entitled, "Wish You Were Here?," an exhibition meant to persuade viewers to vote in favor of a law that would mandate a minimum of three weeks of paid vacation every year for every citizen of King County. The project began in their senior year environmental design class, where all students were allowed to choose their subject. The students selected this topic of paid leave laws in America for many reasons. But mainly they chose it because of their growing interest in employment laws, seeing as they will all be starting their careers. Kristin, Becky, Megan, and Katrina will be graduating this coming spring from UW, all with degrees in Visual Communication Design.

See their terrific project in this [PDF](#).

GREAT NEW RESOURCE FROM THE SLOAN WORK AND FAMILY RESEARCH NETWORK

Sent to us by Julie Schwartz Weber, Policy Specialist, Sloan Network

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network recently released, "Providing Working Families with an Important Resource: Time," at:

http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/pdfs/policy_makers13.pdf.

The brief highlights state legislative activity from 2005-2007 that enables working families to manage better their work and family needs, without sacrificing their mental and physical health, work responsibilities, salary, or familial responsibilities. Legislation discussed includes bills regarding flexible work schedules, part-time employment, phased retirement, family leave and remote work. The brief also summarizes research on how providing such resources impacts workers, businesses, and states.

For more information on work-family legislative initiatives and trends, visit the Sloan Work and Family Research Network website -- the premier online destination for work-family state policy resources with a bills and statutes database, policy briefs, statistics, and reports at:

<http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/policy.php>.

Check out our new website design, with all the information previously available, reorganized to facilitate easier information retrieval.

INTERNATIONAL DOWNSHIFTING WEEK WAS APRIL 19-25

We missed it, but here's some information about the week from founder Tracey Smith in the United Kingdom. Congratulations to Tracey on this great event. Next year we'll be ready for you! And remember you can apply Tracey's great tips (below) anytime of year! Here's her press release:

UK awareness campaign *National Downshifting Week*, now in its 4th year, has been elevated to 'International' status.

This comes following a wave of support from overseas organisations and visitors asking for 'official inclusion' in this unique event. This non-profit campaign is spearheaded by writer/broadcaster on sustainable living, [Tracey Smith](#) and encourages participants to 'slow down and green up', live more sustainably and get a better work and life balance.

The official website, www.DownshiftingWeek.com lists many simple living suggestions and people are encouraged to try one a day throughout the week. The net result of the slow down benefits the general health and well being of the individual, reduces their stress, can improve their personal and sexual relationships too and also benefit their local and global environments.

The suggestions include: -

- 1) Plant something in the garden to cultivate and eat.
- 2) Eliminate 3 non-essential purchases this week.
- 3) Cut up a credit card and focus on living within your means.
- 4) Book a ½ day holiday from work to spend entirely with the one you love, no DIY allowed.
- 5) Cook a simple meal using fresh, locally sourced ingredients and enjoy it together at the table.
- 6) Tonight, turn off the television, turn on the radio, play a few games and talk.

There is also a guide to chart personal progress called '[The Downshifting Manifesto](#)' which is available to read or print responsibly from the website.

Unique visitors during the 7-day event in 2007, numbered around 11,000, from 96 countries and 24 American states and with the forthcoming addition of several short films on '[How To Downshift](#)', the IDW team are set to easily exceed those numbers.

CONTACT - Tracey Smith – Tracey@DownshiftingWeek.com - www.DownshiftingWeek.com - Tel: 07817 156 391

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IN THE NEWS

TAKE BACK YOUR TIME BOARD MEMBER RICHARD HOBBS IS RUNNING FOR SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA BOARD OF SUPERVISORS.

(February 29, 2008 -- San Jose, CA) – Richard Hobbs, a San Jose/Evergreen Community College Board Trustee announced today that he is running for Santa Clara County Supervisor, Seat 2 to succeed Supervisor Blanca Alvarado who cannot run for re-election due to term limits. Hobbs, the Director of the Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations is respected for his decades of community involvement, honest leadership and cultural sensitivity. He seeks to bring his drive, values, vision, compassion, and analytical capacity to the Board of Supervisors.

JOE ROBINSON MAKES THE CASE FOR PAID VACATION ON THE FOX BUSINESS CHANNEL.

Check it out at:

<http://www.foxbusiness.com/video/index.html>

Go to the Video Search window in the middle of the page and type in "Is America Overworked, Robinson" and the interview will come up.

WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL STORY HIGHLIGHTS TAKE BACK YOUR TIME'S VACATION CAMPAIGN.

Read the story at:

<http://www.madison.com/wsj/home/entertainment/282235>

NORTHWEST ALABAMA TIMES-DAILY ARTICLE FEATURES TAKE BACK YOUR TIME.

See the article at:

<http://www.timesdaily.com/article/20080421/NEWS/804210317/1011>

SR. JOAN CHITTISTER MUSES ABOUT LIFE, STRESS, TRAFFIC, AND HAWAII.

<http://ncrcafe.org/node/1740>

JUGGLING ACT AFFECTS COACHES TOO!

Sent to us by a reader:

<http://freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080320/SPORTS07/803200345>

D.C. COUNCIL PASSES NATION'S SECOND PAID SICK DAYS ACT

by Elaine Shannon

Friday, March 07, 2008

Washington, D.C. is poised to become the second jurisdiction in the nation to require employers to provide paid sick days to their employees. Advocates estimate that more than 210,000 workers in the nation's capitol will benefit, once the measure, unanimously approved by the D.C. Council March 4, goes into effect.

"This is a tremendous victory," says Karen M. Minatelli, deputy director of the D.C. Employment Justice Center, an advocacy group that received a \$25,000 grant last fall from the Public Welfare Foundation to educate the public about the need for paid sick days as a minimum workplace standard. Minatelli says that the D.C. measure, like a San Francisco ordinance that went into effect in February 2007, could prove especially important to younger workers and single parents of young children, since they tend to cluster in low-wage service and construction jobs that rarely include paid sick days. The measure should prove of particular benefit to women who, according to U.S. Census studies, head 84 percent of the District's single-headed households.

But Minatelli cautions that the bill was only a "great first step" toward her organization's goal of covering all working people in the District. "Obviously, this is a far cry from the bill as originally introduced," she says. During heated debate, the council, heeding business community pleas, exempted workers with less than a year on the job. As originally drafted, the bill made a 60-day exemption for new hires. The initial proposal mandated 10 sick days a year for workers in businesses with more than five employees and five days a year for smaller concerns. The council made more generous concessions to small and medium-size businesses: the final version of the bill requires businesses employing more than 100 people to offer seven sick days annually, but those employing 25 to 99 workers need provide five sick days a year and those with less than 25 workers, just three sick days a year.

The council excluded altogether certain types of health care workers and all restaurant wait staff. "From a public health perspective, those are not occupations that should be exempted," says Minatelli. In addition, the council added a hardship exemption for businesses that make a case that their financial viability is threatened by the mandate.

Even so, says Minatelli, "We do think this is a really important step that will be of great value to a lot of people in the District."

"Providing paid sick and safe days to those working some of our most grueling jobs is the right thing to do and benefits the whole community," says Debra Ness, president of the National Partnership for Women & Families, recipient of a \$305,000, two-year Public Welfare Foundation grant and coordinator of a national education campaign on the issue. "We are, however, disappointed," Ness adds, "that this new measure has a hardship exemption and excludes some food service workers and workers in the first year of their jobs."

Some 14 other states and jurisdictions are debating paid sick days requirements. Last month, the Alaska Public Interest Group testified at a hearing on the issue in Juneau, where the state legislature is considering a measure to guarantee workers one hour a week of paid sick leave to care for themselves or family members. In Maine, the state legislature is considering mandating up to five paid sick days a year. "The public has already made the connection: 87 percent of Maine voters believe that Maine should require paid sick days," says Sarah Standiford, Executive Director of the Maine Women's Lobby, which is organizing a public education campaign around the issue.

The Alaska and Maine advocacy organizations are operating with funding for their education efforts from the Public Welfare Foundation, which last year launched a two-year, \$1 million special initiative that is the first and largest of its

kind devoted solely to the paid sick days issue. To date, the Foundation has made 16 grants of \$1,085,000 to 14 organizations working on the issue. In October, it made paid sick days an integral part of its Workers' Rights program.

The D.C. measure will become law once it is signed by Mayor Adrian Fenty and passes a 90-day Congressional review.

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YOUR LETTERS

From Lansing, Michigan

I am excited about the idea and potential for Minimum Paid Leave, but I also know that many employers will get around the rules if there is any way for them to do so. Would this act affect part-time worker benefits? If it is only applied to full-time workers some employers might use it as a reason/excuse to reduce their full-time work force in favor of more part-time staff. Where I work, 75% of the employees are part-time. In fact, because our full-time union employees get excellent benefits with lots of paid time off and the part-time employees get none, many 30-hour a week employees work more annual hours than their full-time colleagues. I am exceptionally fortunate to be among the full-timers, but I don't want to see that ratio to grow any larger. On the contrary, I'd like very much to see many of my 30-hour colleagues given full-time positions. My employer doesn't need any more excuses to replace every full-time employee who leaves with 2 part-time.

From Portland, Oregon

I subscribe and enjoy and support your work. I formerly worked at a prison in Oregon, as an HR manager. The union contracts allowed 15 days of vacation per year for the first few years of employment to corrections officers (guards). Unfortunately, the legislature never funded the prisons for "relief time." In other words, when a CO is absent, another CO must work overtime or someone must be hired to cover for employees who are out. Because the department wasn't funded for either, most officers routinely go for three or four years without the ability to schedule a vacation. It has been going on so long, it's considered routine. I think it's unconscionable. Talk to someone working as a CO in a prison. They all have stories of trying to schedule a vacation. Ultimately, they end up calling in sick or getting hurt on the job and get time off that way. Not the same as a vacation.

From London, England

I felt compelled to write this. I would also state that I am British and lucky enough to have always had at least 5 weeks holiday per year. For no real reason I started researching employment law in the US and was shocked to discover that there was no minimum time off here (also that a person can have their employment terminated at will but that is another story!)

I wanted to say that there is one other benefit you did not mention to having a mandated minimum period of time off and that is an (probable) economic one (legislators may prick up their ears on that one).

If people have vacation time they will use it to go on holiday thus spending money on transport (good for the bankrupt airlines) accommodation, food, souvenirs etc. (new/additional? jobs for all those people involved in the chain). I am sure that it would add some percentage to U.S. GDP. Maybe you could commission a study to prove this (or have you already?).

Is it not ironic that the productivity levels for France (which is pretty much shut down in August) and the US are very similar? Maybe it is not the quantity of work done but the quality as it were?

In the land of the free the labor laws are as antiquated as serfdom!!

Well done on the campaign and I wish you well.

From Holyoke, Massachusetts

I see things on the web and in the media on a daily basis that relate to time poverty. From issues with schools and children, the elderly, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, all the things discussed in the Take Back Your Time Handbook. And every time I think that someone should contact the people responsible for the research or who are discussing the issue and give the Take Back Your Time perspective. When I see an article in the paper about obesity, drug and alcohol treatment, childcare, problems with children or community problems, I think of how time poverty contributes to the problem. One time I wrote to a drug treatment researcher who was talking about the efficacy of drug treatment. I talked about how in my job in substance abuse and in my personal life in a 12 step program, people's availability to help others recover has declined. In fact, for convenience many meetings have shifted to meet at 6 pm, so people can shoot in and out after work. No more coffee and fellowship after the meeting, a cornerstone to recovery in some respects. The researcher wrote me back and thanked me. But it got me thinking that if you did some sort of media watch and contacted people who write articles or do research and then publish in the main stream media, and told them how their issue related to time poverty it could have a profound effect by putting the thoughts and viewpoints of your movement in the minds of these people. They may not agree but it would get the issue in people's minds. It would be great if the Time day website had letters available to download or use as a template for an e-mail, addressing major issues and could be used to send to people. The more people you contact, the more likely the average guy on the street will talk about this. I work with the average guy on the street and when I talk about getting mandatory vacation time they laugh. They feel like they have no power or say over their lives and most of them give up more of it by not even bothering to vote.

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