



# TAKE BACK YOUR TIME

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## NEWSLETTER - December 2009

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### Letter from the Executive Director- John de Graaf

Well, it's time for apologies again, because I'm late with the newsletter. Just never enough time! ☺ Here's wishing all of you a wonderful holiday season! I've just returned from a wonderful conference in Brazil—you can read my report at the end of this letter. It's clear that the time issue is gaining steam around the world, and even here in the US, as you'll see by some of the media reports later in this newsletter.

### HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL STUDY SUPPORTS SHORTER WORK-TIME

A recent Harvard Business School—October, 2009—study (MAKING TIME OFF PREDICTABLE AND REQUIRED, by Leslie Perlow and Jessica Porter—no link unfortunately) found that employees who work shorter hours with clearly defined breaks—including vacation time—that do not include electronic connections to their employer not only have higher job satisfaction and better work-life balance, they learn better, communicate with co-workers better and deliver more value (higher productivity) than long-hour employees who are connected to electronic leashes.

This is a powerful study and further confirmation of our argument that shorter work-time and more vacation time will actually be good for business.

### MERGER WITH NEW DREAM IS OFF

It's my hope that early in 2010, we can get back on track on the vacation bill and other pressing TAKE BACK YOUR TIME matters. In all honesty, the vacation summit took a lot out of me, and probably many of our board members and we've yet to catch up. On a down note, I have to report that our hoped-for merger with the Center for a New American Dream appears like it will not happen. The Center has been in a hard place lately, with several staff layoffs and its board is simply not ready to take on another project. I am

exploring other avenues for strengthening TAKE BACK YOUR TIME by aligning with other organizations and through develop of a possible institute at the University of Washington that would focus on work-time, health, inequality and the environment. I will have more to report on that in the next newsletter.

### **MEET OUR NEW VOLUNTEER**

I want to thank our newest volunteer Alyssa Ballinger Johnson for her excellent work on this newsletter. You'll enjoy her essay about how she took back her time after learning about TAKE BACK YOUR TIME, another success story we're proud of.

### **FUNDRAISING REPORT**

Thanks to wonderful support from many of you, Take Back Your Time reached about 45% of our fundraising goal from the last appeal and we are staying afloat. But we still need more support to get flourishing again.

**After paying all our bills for the conference and other expenses we only have \$668 in the bank, which is much to little to move forward with our vacation work. I hope you'll consider donating before the New Year. Remember, contributions to TAKE BACK YOUR TIME are tax deductible. You can donate on-line on our Web site:**



**or send your check to:**

**CRESP/Take Back Your Time, PO Box 19862, Seattle, WA 98109. Please donate today!**

As an example of how seriously our work is now being taken, see the reports below. But we can't do it without you!

### **UPCOMING SPEAKING**

On January 21<sup>st</sup>, I'll be presenting at a science conference in Washington DC, along with board member Anmarie Widener. We'll be talking about how Shorter Work-Time is necessary to achieve environmental sustainability.

In February I'll be on a speaking tour of Southeastern universities:

- Feb. 8/9 University of Georgia at Athens
- Feb. 10 Georgia Tech, Atlanta
- Feb. 11 Central Florida Community College in Ocala
- Feb. 12 Film event with Congressman Alan Grayson in Orlando, FL
- Feb. 15 Furman University, Greenville, SC
- Feb. 16 Clemson University, SC
- Feb. 17/18 University of South Carolina at Columbia

Hope to meet some of you during this tour! If you're speaking anywhere about time issues, please let us know. We'll include you in our next newsletter.

### **GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS CONFERENCE**

People around the world know that greater happiness depends on more work-life balance. Here is my report from the fascinating conference I just spoke at in Brazil:



[shiny % 20happy %  
20people . jpg](#)

## [The 5th International Gross National Happiness Conference](#)

WorldChanging - USA

by John de Graaf Just before Thanksgiving, I attended the 5th International Gross National Happiness Conference, held at Iguassu Falls, Brazil. ...

### ECONOMIST MAGAZINE DEBATE ON HOLIDAY TIME

This week I'll be interviewed by CBS TV news for a piece they are doing on Americans' leisure time—or lack thereof. And later this month I'll be one of two debaters in the ECONOMIST magazine's monthly online debate. The topic is: Europeans Take Too Much Holiday Time. I'll be debating the negative position of course. The debate will run between Dec. 22 and 31.

Wish me luck!

And happy holidays to all of you! Remember, there's no present like the time!

Leisurely yours!

John

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### Letter from the Assistant Editor- Alyssa Johnson

#### Taking Back My Time

*Reflections on how I took back my time, because of Take Back Your Time, and gave back the time I took to Take Back Your Time.*

I was one of those lucky graduates who had a job lined up right after college. Not just any job: a salaried job with benefits, and on top of that, a job that helps the environment. I even get to work outside some days. How could I not be happy? Sure, I was grateful, yet everyday I would come home stressed and miserable. Why? I'll explain it this way: remember those conversations where everyone comes up with their dream job? Someone always says, "ice cream tester!" to which the next person scoffs, "yeah, but could you really do that all day, every day?" It comes down to too much of one thing.

Eating ice cream all day sounds nice, but you would be so full and sick by the end of the day, you would never be able to stomach a healthy dinner when you came home. My job felt like that. After a week of deadlines, responsibilities, analytical thinking, and the tedious details that went along with it all, I would spend my evenings and weekends just trying to forget about work. Instead of having time to think, I spent my time trying not to. I didn't have the energy to volunteer or cook or learn new things. That is, until I started taking Fridays off.

Taking Fridays off is about more than just an extra eight hours. My shorter weeks and longer weekends give me time to recharge. The time I had all along is more productive. I have energy for things I never would have before, including volunteering for Take Back Your Time.

When I tell my co-workers I don't work on Fridays, it inevitably sets off a conversation. Not surprisingly, everyone says they would like to have Fridays off too. Some ask me what the policy is, how it works. I tell them it's pretty straightforward at our company. I earn 20% less money, 20% less vacation time, pay part of the insurance premium, and so on; everything is pro-rated 20%. Some ask me how I can afford it. I tell them

I try to live simply and buy less stuff. Most people have more extraneous expenses than they realize until they're forced to take a good look at their budgets. It was easy for me because I stuck to the budget I had coming out of college. I don't have kids or a mortgage. However, parents are arguable the ones who can least afford it, yet many make a part-time salary work for the very sake of their kids. Everyone has to decide what the trade off is, and whether it's worth it. In most cases I doubt anyone would regret choosing the time over the money. At this point in the conversation, a question is often asked that reveals the final barrier between many people and the schedule they want. How did you do it? How did you manage to get a part-time schedule?

Though I know now that it is a simple matter of asking, I understand the question well, because I remember how scared I was. Even after I had made the decision, it took me over a year to finally work up the courage to say to my manager, "I want to work part-time". I knew I could give up the money, but I felt like it was not "okay" to work less. Wasn't I just lazy? Shouldn't I be grateful that I have weekends at all? Wasn't it irresponsible and maybe stupid to earn less money when I should be saving for a house and retirement? Most of all, I was afraid of how I would be perceived by my manager and everyone senior to me. I was afraid my manager would ask me "why", and that my explanation of wanting a better lifestyle would come out sounding feeble and suddenly I would be seen as a weak link in the company chain.

It's no coincidence that I am now volunteering for Take Back Your Time. Finding the website and reading about the shorter European workweek, and about how in the 1950s they thought we would be living in "the age of leisure", yet now we work more than ever, gave me the courage to finally do the scary thing and *ask*. Take Back Your Time was the support I needed to feel like I wasn't crazy or lazy for wanting things to be different. Ironically, after all my fear, my manager never asked me why. We simply discussed whether I could transfer some of my workload to others, and he said he would get back to me after asking our director. I felt light and free, and it made me work harder because I was even more grateful for having this job. Companies should take note: giving an employee what they want immediately makes them more loyal and productive, and sometimes what they want is not more money, but more time.

I know it's not as simple for everyone. I am lucky to be in a work environment where part-time schedules are accepted, even if most people are too afraid to ask. A lot of it has to do with the corporate culture. A company can have time flexibility in their policy, but if part-time workers are perceived as bad employees, very few are going to feel like they can take advantage of that flexibility. However, policy is important too. Some places take away your benefits completely if you don't work 40 hours. Many jobs don't have benefits in the first place, and some pay so little you have to take all the hours you can get. Some jobs require overtime to meet deadlines or because of a lack of trained staff. Obviously, these are problems we need to solve. But where will we find the time?

Many of my co-workers also work part-time. All but one of them is a mother, and I am so thankful to them for paving the way. They are the ones, my own mother included, who banded together and tried to bargain with bosses who failed to see how it would help their bottom line. They made this all possible, and now I am trying to help Take Back Your Time push it a step or two further.

Whenever I can, I try to get my co-workers, especially the men, to follow my lead. My reasons are selfish: if we all took Fridays off, I wouldn't get that nagging feeling on my day off that I'm somehow abandoning the team. If we all took Fridays off, surely productivity would go up, and then we'd all get a raise. If we all took Fridays off, surely there would be more jobs, the economy would improve, and we'd all get another raise. If we all took Fridays off, surely we would give and get more for free, and we wouldn't even need those raises. If everyone I worked with took off one day a week, how could it not trickle down into time spent making, thinking, solving, acting?

Of course, part of my Fridays are spent doing so-called "unproductive" things as well, like sleeping in, drawing cartoons, spending time with friends, and I'll even admit I watch a little TV sometimes. I suppose I

should be spending the time thinking up solutions to the world's problems, but then it's only an extra eight hours; it fills up fast. Maybe I should take off Mondays, too.

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## Take Back Your Time Day events

Several events were put together in the days leading up to Take Back Your Time Day with the theme Chill Out.

Under the title *Chill Out: Working & Consuming Less for Health, Happiness, Justice, & the Planet*, John de Graaf, Richard Hobbs (Executive Director, Human Agenda), Stan King (Simplicity Circle Leader), and Cecile Andrews (Author, Less Is More, Slow Is Beautiful, and Circle of Simplicity) spoke at San Jose State University on October 22.

At the **University of Central Missouri**, on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, students from the Social Work Program in the Department of Sociology & Social Work and personal health students from the Departments of Kinesiology and Nutrition gathered to provide information regarding the 350.org & Take Back Your Time Day movements. Petitions were available for signing and a time survey was conducted. A banner was created throughout the day and a group photo with the completed banner was submitted to 350.org. This photo along with all 350 photos will be hand delivered to the Secretary General of the UN and local, national and international officials. Thanks to Maureen Wilt for organizing this.

[350.org photo of the University of Central Missouri Chill Out event](#)

[The Leisure Link](#), a co-sponsor for the [2009 Massachusetts Relocalization Conference](#), provided information on Take Back Your Time at their table during the conference on October 18<sup>th</sup>. **Alison Link, of The Leisure Link, also organized a great get together of Time Day supporters in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts on October 8<sup>th</sup>.** John de Graaf and Alison both spoke to the group.

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## Take Back Your Time in the Media

### [FOR THE UNEMPLOYED, THE DAY STACKS UP DIFFERENTLY](#)

The New York Times - Amanda Cox et al. – July 31, 2009

*"If all we were doing is substituting production at home for production in the marketplace," said Daniel S. Hamermesh, an economics professor at the University of Texas at Austin, "then maybe unemployment wouldn't be so bad."*

→ [Interactive Graphic](#): how different groups spend their time

[BUSINESS CLASS, INC. QUOTE OF THE WEEK THEME: TAKE BACK YOUR TIME](#) Oct 19 – Oct 24, 2009

[ITHACA COLLEGE STUDENTS INVITE THE CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY TO SLOW DOWN AND SMELL THE ROSES](#)

Ithaca College - Keith Davis – October 21, 2009

## **FREE TO LOSE**

The New York Times – Paul Krugman – November 12, 2009

[Paul Krugman compares Germany's jobs policy to the U.S. "G.D.P. Policy" and suggests we follow their lead in giving private businesses incentives to keep workers with reduced hours in a poor economy.](#)

**A new study by a team from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor linked recessions to better health, sparking a great deal of news coverage:**

## **THE UPSIDE OF RECESSIONS**

ScienceNOW Daily News – Cassandra Willyard – Sep 28, 2009

## **STUDY: BAD ECONOMY MAY BE GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH**

Health.com - Theresa Tamkins- Sep 28, 2009

## **ARE RECESSIONS GOOD FOR OUR HEALTH?**

Discovery News – Jessica Marshall – Sep 28, 2009

## **IS THIS ECONOMIC DOWNTURN JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED?**

Booster Shots (LA Times) – Karen Kaplan – Sep 28, 2009

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## **Vacation Bill Status / Paid Vacation Act of 2009 in the News**

HR 2564, Congressman Grayson's Paid Vacation Act of 2009 is in committee and needs your support. For Take Back Your Time Day, considering writing letters to your Senators and Congresspeople supporting the bill. It's a modest piece of legislation but an important first step. Currently, believe it or not, only the Guyanas, Nepal, the United States and that paragon of human rights, Myanmar (Burma) have no law mandating paid vacations for workers. We'll update the Bill's status in our next newsletter. It is currently in a cue behind several bills.

## **VACATIONS – WHO NEEDS THEM?**

The Huffington Post -- Judi Casey – October 27, 2009

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## **Book Review**

THE POWER OF SLOW: 101 WAYS TO SAVE TIME IN OUR 24/7 WORLD

by Christine Louise

Reviewed by Kelley Smith

Is your relationship with time easy-going, balanced, or time-crunched? To find out, read *The Power of Slow: 101 Ways to Save Time in Our 24/7 World* by Christine Louise Hohlbaum. The first chapter includes a quiz, and I was pleased to get a score that placed me in the "balanced" category. But there's more here than this one little quiz!

Each chapter begins with a gem of a quote—my favorite comes from Chapter Two.

**Trying to do too many things at once produces that jangled, error-prone condition that used to be called stress, but is now referred to as multi-tasking.**

Then, we get an introduction to the respective topic for the chapter, followed by ten (count them--ten in each chapter) principles to help us deal with that topic. A summary follows that ties ten principles together. There are eleven chapters in all, the final chapter having only one keystone principle.

The book explores our attitudes and cultural baggage, our habits, and our choices. Yet, the message is upbeat, not a tongue-lashing telling us how badly we've mismanaged our lives. Cultural phenomena such as multi-tasking, conference calling, and "student syndrome" (an exaggerated form of procrastination) all find a way into Holhlbaum's easy-flowing prose.

My first thought, when I had an opportunity to read the book was, "The timing is unfortunate—now that unemployment is so prevalent, no one will be interested in saving time!" But, on further reflection, I realized how wrong I was. Anyone looking for a job right now faces the same time crunches—how much time do I spend trying to learn new software? How much time should I spend obtaining additional training? Should I fill out yet another application, or just simply open my own window-washing service? Time crunches aren't only for the gainfully employed!

All of us, no matter what our situation, could find a valuable nugget of wisdom here that makes this book worth the time.

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### **Shorter Work Weeks and the Environment—a letter from TBYT Board Member Greg Wright to the LA Times**

Letters to the Editor  
Los Angeles Times

*Re "A New Push to Create Jobs," November 27*

"Lawmakers are considering myriad ways to accelerate job growth" as unemployment remains stubbornly too high, reports the Times. But Congress is missing one of the best ways to create jobs and make them greener, at least as far as commuting is concerned: a federally-defined shorter 36-hour workweek of four nine-hour days.

U.S. workers are the most car-intensive commuters in the world. In the economy's better days earlier this decade, 88 percent of them got to work by car, and 77 percent drove solo. The number of workers with commutes lasting more than 60 minutes grew by almost 50% between 1990 and 2000, commuting miles driven by Americans went up 15 percent, and the number of Americans commuting alone rose to above three out of four. Long-distance commuting increased so drastically the government redefined "extreme commuting" upward from 60 minutes to 90 one-way, and found grew to two percent of the population. Meanwhile, the number of Americans who walk or bicycle to work is about four percent -- compared to Europe's 20 percent.

A four-day workweek will enable American workers to reduce the amount of time, and carbon, they spend commuting to and from their jobs -- and the time available to spend with their families, or to train and prepare for a better job -- by 20 percent! But only if the U.S. adopts a new workweek less than 40 hours in length. The current 40-hour week, officially adopted 70 years ago, necessitates ten-hour days on a four-day schedule -- too long for many people, and intolerable for anyone who must devote significant time to commuting.

Gregory Wright

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## Your Letters

### **From North Hollywood, CA**

I'm really discouraged that, after being in the work force for some 30 years all I have to show for it is 2 weeks vacation. Our system needs a vast improvement. Its really disheartening to finally work your way up to having a decent amount of time off, only through no fault of your own(cutbacks) lose said job and then have to start all over again (and hope the company keeps you long enough so that you get to earn more time). DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS!!

### **From Melbourne, FL**

Originally from England but spent most of my life in the US and enjoy living here very much. After graduating from college and working here for a year I was given the opportunity to work back in England for a year and I was so grateful for the immediate 25 days vacation I had. It provided such a great opportunity to learn about the world and to spend time with my family; unfortunately, I am now back in the US working 50 hrs a week and a year from now I will be lucky enough to earn 8 days off.