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## **Feel sorry for the workaholic who fails to realize how precious time is**

*By Diether Haenicke*  
*March 25, 2009*

When I was a young man living and studying in Greece, I strolled one weekday morning through Athens to spend a few hours at my favorite spot on Mount Lycabettos, which afforded the best view over the city. On my way I passed by a used-book store and noticed in the window a rare and early edition of Schiller's works at a price that was stiff for a struggling student but still far below its fair market price.

Within minutes I decided to move to a cheaper hotel and to forgo taxis for the rest of my stay and to buy the fine edition instead. And so I did.

When the purchase had been completed I told the dealer that I did not want to lug the many volumes up to Lycabettos, and that I would pick up the parcel on my way home after lunch. That was not possible, he replied, because he had decided to close the store right after I left. Through my purchase he had earned enough money for the day, and he would take the rest of the day off. I was welcome to fetch the books the next day since he would be open again tomorrow.

I have thought about that little anecdote often in my life when necessity, ambition or pure insanity drove me to work long hours. But perhaps I did not think about this lesson often enough. When I was a young father, I held an office that often demanded 10- to 12-hour workdays. It was not uncommon that I had left for the university before the children woke up and returned home after my wife had put them to bed. I often just saw them asleep.

One day, returning from a four-day lecture tour, I had brought both children a toy from the trip. They embraced me and said: "We didn't know that you had been out of town."

That was my conversion point. If a four-day absence goes unnoticed by your children you are shortchanging the children and yourself.

From then on it was parents' nights at school, watching the children's teams, building things with them, reading with them, practicing the multiplication tables, watching them play in the backyard, listening to and laughing at the jokes they brought home from school -- all the things that are so enjoyable while they go on and that are so long remembered afterwards.

Why is it so hard to learn the simple lessons and not find the small and perhaps only true moments of happiness in life?

We know that great satisfaction does come from our work and a fulfilling professional life. Moreover, we all need to put bread on our tables.

But how much bread does one need? Does one's house have to get ever bigger? How many toys can a person really play with? And at what price do these luxuries come?

Is time itself perhaps more precious than time spent to make all these acquisitions possible? Is time more valuable if spent on family, friends and personal reflection rather than on increasing one's net worth?

I have met many people over the years who tell me with great pride that they are workaholics. It is meant to be a badge of honor and distinction that separates them from those others who come home without a briefcase full of paperwork, who do not sit up late into the night plotting the work for the next overloaded day, week or month.

Workaholics are addicted -- the very name suggests it -- and like all addicts they bear the traits of excessive and uncontrollable behavior. Why would anyone consider addictive behavior praiseworthy and exemplary? I cannot. Knowing how fast life flows by, I rather feel sorry for the workaholic who seeks our approving admiration but who, in my eyes, shortchanges his own life and the lives of those around him.

I have yet to hear about the man who, on his deathbed, regretted that he did not spend more time at the office.

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[mlive.com/kalamazoo](http://mlive.com/kalamazoo)*