Here’s How We Waste Time at Work



You know how it goes. You look up and it’s 5:00. It’s quitting time! Where did the day go? And, what do you have to show for your time at work?

Salary.com conducted a survey in 2014 that showed the average American employee wasted more than two hours every workday in non-work related activities. That costs employers more than $750 billion annually.

In their 2013 survey, 69% of all respondents said they wasted at least some time at work on a daily basis. There was a significant increase from 2013 until 2014 – about 20% – and now, 89% say they waste time at work.

Here’s the breakdown of the time in hours:

- 30 minutes daily – 31%
- 1 hour daily – 31%
- 2 hours daily – 16%
- 3 hours daily – 6%
- 4 hours daily – 2%
- 5 or more hours daily – 2%

So, 4% of the people surveyed waste at least half the workday on non-work-related tasks. *(Really, wow…)*

And regarding those social sites:

Facebook was the big time-waster in 2013. In 2014, it’s Google. LinkedIn came in third with 14% followed by:

- Yahoo – 7%
- Amazon – 2%
- YouTube – 2%
- ESPN – 2%
- Pinterest, Twitter, and Craigslist each receiving 1%.

What about gender and age differences?

Single men in their 20s and 30s waste the most time. Men waste a bit more time than women. Men waste 91% compared to 87% for women.

Marital status, you ask? Results show that 91% of single people waste time compared to 88% of married employees, and 85% of those who are divorced.

The biggest offenders? People between the ages of 26 to 39.

Results by age:

- Age 18-25 waste time daily – 91%
- Age 26-32 waste time daily – 95%
- Age 33-39 waste time daily – 92%
- Age 40-50 waste time daily – 90%
- Age 51-60 waste time daily – 85%
- Age 60+ waste time daily – 78%

Why do they do it?

Because they think they are being proactive. *(And, that's a good thing, right?)*

More than half (53%) of those surveyed say they waste time because they believe short breaks actually increase productivity. Boredom came in second with 20% of employees saying they just aren't interested enough in their jobs to be productive. Bringing up the rear is, lack of incentive (8%), being unsatisfied with their jobs (7%), and not being paid enough (2%) also made the list.

Wasted time: online versus real-life.

Of those surveyed, 26% said the biggest time-wasting activity was browsing the Internet but you knew the rest of these items weren't too far behind:

- Meetings – 24% *(You knew it was coming!)*
- Tied for second was dealing with annoying coworkers – both at 24%
- Returning emails accounted for 12%, dealing with an irritating boss was at 7%, social media at 4%, and personal phone calls came in at 2%

What days are worst?

Tuesday mornings are the most productive time of the week. And, the most productive time of any day is between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m.

As you might guess, Friday afternoons are still the chief time to waste time. Forty-four percent said they waste the most time on Fridays, and 22% said they waste the most time between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.

Monday is an interesting day as well. The other most wasteful time was Monday afternoon, with 18% choosing Mondays as a big time waster.

Does industry matter?

In 2013, workers in the government wasted the most time at work. But we have a new champion in 2014. All of the people working in the finance and banking industry who took the 2014 survey – that's 100% – admitted to wasting at least a little time at work each day.

Coming in second were people working in the arts, media, and entertainment business with 95% of employees wasting time daily, and then the engineering, design, and construction industry with 94%.

In case you are wondering, only 90% of government workers said they wasted time in the 2014 survey.

What's your boss think?

The answer and attitudes vary. Many companies realize distractions are going to be unavoidable. Yet some organizations do ban certain sites like Facebook from company computers.

Of those who took the survey, 27% said their employers block many non-work-related websites. That number is actually down 3% from last year. Even if there was a policy to ban those sites, 56% said they would just use their personal devices like their smartphones for access.

Furthermore, 8% said they would consider leaving a job if such a policy was enacted, and 14% said it might cause them to reject a job offer.

What's it all mean?

I leave it to each person to draw your own conclusions. This is not a "shame on you" article. It merely highlights the various ways we waste time throughout the workday.

However, for managers, it highlights the need to keep employees engaged and to create meaningful work and challenging projects. Boredom accounts for a fairly significant reason why employees waste time. Twenty percent (20%) of people surveyed said they simply weren't interested enough in their jobs to pay full attention.

For the record, this article took about two minutes or so to read so I hope not to hear any comments on time being wasted while reading! *(Joking… comment away)*

[author]

Jan Johnston Osburn, Talent Acquisition Executive[/author]