



LIFE MEETS WORK

Once upon a time, there was work and there was life, and rarely the twain met. If you didn't leave your work at the office, you took it home in a briefcase. Work was almost a physical thing, a creature, an entity—sometimes a monster you wouldn't want intruding on your *life*. The briefcase would thump onto the table in the hall by the front door. There it would sit, big, ugly, and intrusive. An interloper.

"My father, who was an art director, used to come home with these big packages," recalls Donny Deutsch, sketching out a huge, unwieldy shape with his hands. And there was an attitude about work that really didn't jibe with the pleasantries of the rest of your life. "When my father talked about tackling a challenge at work, he'd say" — Deutsch grimaces — "'We've got to break the back of this thing.' That was the way people thought about work."

Work was . . . well, *work*. Putting hours in the work bank was

like doing time or a prison sentence. Like hard time in the big house, your career status was measured in the years you'd been at a company: one to five; three to ten; a lifer. All jobs were relatively interchangeable. Who ever heard of the guy next door going off in the morning to a sexy job, unless you lived next door to, say, Steve McQueen? There was little charisma to be had about the office, or any form of work. Everybody pretty much looked alike, sounded alike, worked alike. There were few business media icons outside of the scions of inherited family fortunes. No one sector of the economy was a particularly provocative place to be. Rather than providing a venue to quick success, work was a structure that was fixed on keeping the young entrant on a long and predictable path, along with hordes of his or her peers.

As Deutsch puts it, "Other than for the very, very top captains of industry, work was not defining."

Of course, work still is *work*. But the edges have blurred, as life and work mutually seep across each other's boundaries. Technology has created the virtual briefcase, allowing work to be accessible almost anywhere, any time. Your work can be whenever and wherever you log on.

In Europe, one of the wrecking balls of the digital divide is a chain of cafés called the Internet Exchange, where, in countries such as England and France, the cost of a personal computer is often prohibitive, anyone can come in off the street, get a cup of coffee or tea, and plop themselves down in front of one of the dozens of computers that are set up in a casual, almost homey environment. There they can log onto the Internet Exchange's proprietary portal and become part of an online community even if they do not own a computer. Robert Proctor, the company's founder, understands the need to connect because he feels it himself. "Everyone works differently," he says, "but if the working environment wasn't part of my social environment, then I couldn't do it."

The work/social connection is so important to Proctor that when he hires senior managers to join his 400 employees, a key concern is social fit. "I guess I know that any of them can do the job, that they have the skills. But a huge portion is—are they going to fit into this company? It is just such a manic environment that it is important. You have people who are coming in, many of them join based on my personality or the senior management's. They will be working below market rate to do sixty-five hours a week, to come in Saturdays and Sundays. That is a huge factor. So there are a lot of very funny, very smart people in this office."

Proctor feels the Internet business environment itself is obliterating social strata between the old and new economies. "I think that chucking those two sets of people together is really interesting," he says, noting that the Internet Exchange, because of the nature of its business, melds both virtual virtuosos and traditional forty-year real estate veterans. "To see our [seasoned] property guy interacting with an eighteen-year-old Web developer—and at the end of the day, they are both trying to achieve exactly the same thing for the company."

A vice president of a dot com company that is ramping up to go public put it this way: "You see the people who are there till nine at night taking a break at around five, and what do you see? They are gathered around the obligatory foosball table or Ping Pong table—and believe me, my company does have one. They cut out little faces and tape them to the foosball characters and they have our Web sites around the table and there is a whole league they have established. What this is is an outlet for stress but also a building of camaraderie. Never before has an industry been so dependent on getting people to adopt your ideas—or to all adopt the same idea—whether it be the mission of the company or a mission of a division—so that everybody is working toward a common goal."

In such environments, socioeconomic lines blur. In a country where class lines are drawn in indelible ink, the Internet Exchange, where Lord Astor's son is the media director, has thrown together offspring of the titled, people who left school at fourteen, and highly educated brain-trust types. "It is a different mind-set," says Proctor. "It has nothing to do with a demographic. Who cares? What does it matter?"

Donny Deutsch has a view that "very often, businesses that are built around creations and creating something are models for convergence, because creativity doesn't stop. You know if you trade money, that stops when you go home. But when you are creating and birthing things, that happens around the clock whether you're doing it yourself or with other people. With this new economy and all the things involved, yes, work is life and life is work. That's certainly obvious, because of the technology itself which allows for it. But even more so because work and a work endeavor and the creation of these new businesses and economies have a certain cachet that work never had before. Other than the early business stars, the Carnegies, the Mellons, the Fords, for the next forty or fifty years after that, you didn't have these kinds of icons of business, with the exceptions of a few business leaders, like Ted Turner. But with the emerging technology, you have dozens and dozens—from the Steve Cases to the Bezos to those people we see on the covers of magazines every day of the week, or so it seems. So work and the workplace and working became much more of a definer of where you stand in the world, where you were, a good thing, a fun thing. It is who you are and what you do and how much money you make and how effective you are—much more a part of our overall system of where you stand in the world."

Suddenly work is aspirational. And sexy.

"Today's business leaders are the rock stars of this new generation," Deutsch states. And he should know. A staple of his

industry trade publications and in the business press, Deutsch found himself migrating into the glossies alongside the likes of Puffy Combs, Russell Simmons, and Denzel Washington. His engagement was a lead item in the *New York Post* "Page Six" gossip column. A business rock star? As Deutsch sees it, "What a rock star has is the ultimate aspirational perfect lifestyle — there is tons of money, you are in the inner social circles, you love what you do, there is adulation from those around you. So, no, a great young business leader today does not walk into an arena where twenty thousand people are screaming for them and young girls are throwing their bras at them. It is much more subtle than that."

Like the Deutsch/Russell Simmons et al. connection?

Deutsch can't suppress a grin. But, looking out through the glass walls of his perfectly hip 130,000-square-foot office space in New York City in a crisp pink cotton shirt and black denim jeans, he is certainly an example of some sort of business star power. Still, the irony doesn't escape him. "I mean, what is goofier than that? It is hysterical. But there it is — I can now call and get into any restaurant I want. I hate it when I refer to myself, but that is an example of what the media does. So, not myself, but the really visible business people today are really the ultimate aspiration for a lot of people. It would be a fascinating poll on the Internet — to ask young people who would you rather be, the guy who is head of Pearl Jam or Jeff Bezos, or pick your similar person. You know, you couldn't even play that game twenty years ago, because frankly, you couldn't serve up the business name."

Working in the new economy has provided inner rewards that add to the convergence factor. In spite of sixty-hour workweeks, Abbi Gosling, of Agile Industries, finds her work "incredibly relaxing." According to Gosling, "For fun, my husband and I help with each other's companies. It's a very seductive medium."

The Internet allows you to occupy personal and professional worlds simultaneously. "It has an impact on socializing and the

way people make plans,” says Esther Drill, of gURL.com. “With the way people communicate with each other. You feel more connected on a regular basis. People are instant messaging each other and they feel like they’re in the same place, even if you are in New York and the friend is in Brazil.”

And you have more control over your environment. “It leaches over into weekends,” she admits. “But we hang out with each other and we’d all rather do business with people we like,” says Gosling. “When it’s your own company, you can fire the clients you don’t like.

“For me,” says Gosling, “there is very little distinction between what I consider work and what I consider life. I get up and I go to work, but that’s just a representation of the physical place I’m in. I talk about work all the time. This is the most fascinating and the hardest thing—and the most compelling and most satisfying. It feels like having a child, but without the deep emotion. That’s part of the impetus for me.”

One of the first things I noticed when I joined an investment bank was the hive environment—a lot of people were practically living in their offices due to the intensity of the hours. Dry cleaning hung on cubicles. Young people carried bundles of laundry down the hall, as if it were a dorm. (There was a dry cleaner/laundry on the premises.) There were also check-cashing services, a manicurist and beauty salon, a barber, and, across the street, a company-related medical facility. Once I broke the heel off a shoe. That’s when I learned there was a shoe repair on the premises. People ate breakfast at the twenty-four-hour cafeteria, or ferried entire meals up the elevators to their desks in Styrofoam containers. It was not uncommon for young associates and analysts to pull all-nighters, then shower in the company gym in the basement and go straight back to their desks. Many times, when my group added new members, we had to send the keyboards from the former occupants of newly assigned offices back

to technology services because they were encrusted with what appeared to be the moldy remnants of an all-you-can-eat buffet. “Chili,” diagnosed one tech guy with a shrug as he disconnected yet another keyboard-turned-science project. He tucked the offensive piece of plastic under his arm to take it away for a hose-down. “These people live in their computers. You can’t believe what we find in these things.”

TheKnot’s Carley Roney, for one, would believe. “For a long time, it was totally normal to go home at midnight and go straight to sleep. To eat dinner in the office every single solitary night for a year.”

The heat is on, but it is not driving many people out of the kitchen. According to the Gen Y2K study, two-thirds of men and women in their twenties and thirties said that even if there was something else they wanted to do, they would not leave work. One reason may be that, due to the Internet, they can now do many things at work that, in previous years, would have required leaving the premises, whether that was ordering a movie or a pair of shoes. And half of all men and women in their twenties said that they expected to work from home at some point in their career.

There are, however, warning signs on the horizon. Actually, the evidence is stronger than mere signs. There are clear indicators that the wired world as a social whirlpool is in danger of pulling some of the younger participants under. Just as the Internet serves as a social outlet for adults, it provides the same platform for teens. In the Gen Y2K study, Gen Y teens age sixteen to nineteen said that computers are the major way they connect with others. Six in ten girls as well as boys agreed that the primary way they connected was online. The same young people who said this, however, had a discomfiting but logical correlation — they were also less likely than other kids to feel they had a good relationship with another person. Computers can be

the bridge to stave off the loneliness and sense of separateness that is normal at this stage of life: Connect with a click. And perhaps they are part of the reason it can become difficult to move beyond the click.

“Our research has shown, in study after study, that kids who feel a sense of belonging feel healthy,” says Richard Saunders International’s Doug Hall. “Belonging is critical. We ran five separate studies, and the very first factor that came up each time was belonging. Kids are becoming so addicted to these machines because that’s where their sense of belonging is. But they have left the land of the living. Their only sense of belonging is on the computer. They are part of a group, but there is no sense of responsibility for being part of that group. Online, everybody gets heard equally. Nobody can scream louder. Kids are empowered because they’re connected, and what you’ve got is a cybergang. They find the equivalent of a street gang online. But when you’re dealing face to face, it’s dysfunctional.”

Of course, the Internet is far from the only contributing factor in this scenario, but it is one to be reckoned with as families make choices in raising children. Beyond the family, we need to consider these issues and their impact as young people move into the mainstream of society. Those already there are struggling to come to grips with the world they have created.

“We’ve created a network of refugees of the Internet,” says Richard Kirshenbaum, co-chairman of kirshenbaum bond & partners, a creatively driven advertising agency that has an Internet subsidiary, dotglu. Kirshenbaum, along with his partner, Jon Bond, has observed changes in how people communicate. “There is less time in business, things are moving faster, and then what you get are a group of weary people who can actually concentrate on fewer and fewer things,” says Kirshenbaum. “I can communicate with four hundred people with the click of

a button, yet at the same time, I see these people walking the streets looking blank, like misplaced refugees with no place to go.”

Today the Change Agents struggle to find the balance and proportion that any of us seek in our lives—but their lives make their task even tougher. They find themselves looking at the analog world as if through a pane of glass, their noses pressed up against it somewhat nostalgically. And they take steps to reach back into that world, to stay connected in the most everyday of ways, perhaps because when you exist in a rarefied atmosphere, the mundane and everyday are the bridge to reality.

For example, Carley Roney purposefully takes the subway to work, even though it is less convenient. “Because if you live in this little track of taking your car to the job and you work with all these young, smart people, then you just sort of lose track of what the complexity of the world really is,” she says. “And riding the subway, hearing all these different languages, seeing these different relationships—I like that experience. It makes me remember.”

Reality—the new nostalgia.

Abbi Gosling makes quilts, cooks, and, as she puts it, loves “to do the whole domestic thing.”

Steve Klein puts up vegetables and rides a bike everywhere.

Richard Kirshenbaum has observed this scenario. “People are so into the earth and the best that it yields. When you’re dealing with technology, in a certain sense, there’s a dehumanizing factor to it. If you’re in front of a screen every day, or you’re raising money, or analyzing data—whatever you’re doing, I think that at the end of the day you want to do the opposite. You want to, so to speak, get your hands dirty. So on one level, you hear about people having an interest in a vineyard in Sonoma, and they want to trek through the vineyard, or everyone has a wine cellar. Or they have a personal sommelier at their party and make the

connection that way, which people are actually doing. But because of the speed and pace of life and business, the new luxury is macaroni and cheese. When it comes to what is considered luxury, it's having the time to sit in bed and watch a cheesy movie on TV and have macaroni and cheese. On the other hand, there's a sense also of, who can go on the most daring white-water river rafting trip, or who can take the most exotic trip to Asia that requires bringing the most medication? It's 'Well, I had a medicine chest that they injected me with when I went to India.'

"There's less touch in the world of the Internet, and I think that's one reason why places like Starbucks are successful now," says Steve Klein. "They serve a basic need to touch human beings."

Perhaps people who are operating on a level of high engagement in their work find solace in the simple, the uncontrived, and the most basic of human connections, which have nothing in common with technology and everything in common with respite from the complexities of a crowded mind: observing the world from a bicycle or subway; tasting the juice of a sun-ripened cherry; putting your baby to bed. Yet the very nature of a work ethic that crowds the edges of their lives can make these seemingly simple and abundant pleasures elusive. Younger people immersed in the new economy would be the most susceptible, but, because of their age and relative life inexperience, they are less able to achieve the balance necessary to integrate these respites on an ongoing basis. There is talk of balance, but the reality has been all or nothing—total work or total escape; the eighteen-hour workday or the trek through Tibet.

For some of those immersed in the Internet space, the answer is an attempt at proactively protecting their personal spaces, which is not always effective—a clear downside of merging life and work. When these aspects of your life are blended, creating

lines of demarcation can be rather like trying to drawing a line on water.

Carley Roney and her husband and business partner David Liu, for example, resolved to partition off a safe harbor in their personal life when they became parents. They began with an edict that they would not have a computer at home. "When we were at work, we were going to stay at work, and then when we would go home it would be pure home time. There would be no invasion of work," says Liu. The result, however, backfired: "Unfortunately, what it wound up doing for me was that I was spending most of my time at work."

So they broke down, got laptops, and brought them home. "You often find me working with the laptop downstairs in the dark, so I don't wake up my husband or daughter," says Roney, noting that they have a very open floor plan.

"Now it is about trying to come up with a little bit more of a balance," says Liu.

A footnote: For my interview with Liu, I had to go back to his office twice in the same day. The first time he did not arrive and the meeting was canceled; the second time, that same afternoon, he was forty minutes late. He apologized profusely, but, Liu said, he had a very good reason. He had been stuck at his house, having DHL lines installed so he could have high-speed Internet access from home.