

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort from The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

I'm a workaholic by nature. It's not uncommon for me to put in 80 or more hours a week, in spite of the lip service I pay to ideals like rest and family time. Since I recognize this is a problem to be dealt with and not a particularly honorable character trait, I've been doing my best to spend one day a week away from the normal things of my work. Well, okay, one day every two or three weeks, but it's a start.

Part of the problem I have, though, is that I don't really know what to do with myself during these down times. Don't get me wrong: it isn't that I don't have a list of things to do. It's that most of the things on that list are related to work and the existence of a list full of work needing to be done creates great feelings of guilt in my spirit when I do something that isn't work.

I don't bring this up to generate pity or offers of a week's vacation at your beach house or forest cabin – though I will happily take any of those! Instead I mention this because I am not alone. In the US, over 85 percent of men and 66 percent of women work more than 40 hours a week outside the home.

Those of us who are older may remember seeing newsreels showing the world of tomorrow, a future in which people would have to discover new hobbies to fill their leisure time because new efficiencies meant we would be working shorter hours. What ever happened to that fantasy land we all claimed we were looking forward to?

I hate to break it to you, but all those predictions came true - - Kind of.

A recent Bureau of Labor Statistics report demonstrates that American workers are about 400 percent more productive now than they were in 1950. In fact, it takes a

grand total of eleven hours for us to achieve the same amount of work it took our grandparents 40 hours to do. In spite of this, the International Labour Organization points out that, given a 40-hour work week, Americans work almost four weeks more per year than the Japanese, over six weeks more than the Brits, and three MONTHS more than the French!

Should we be worried about the results of this kind of work-centered culture? The answer is an emphatic YES! Medical studies show long hours are linked to serious health problems such as stroke and heart disease, an increase in occupational injuries, and a deep psychological toll on most if not all of the overworked. Increased stress levels and decreased quality of life and family are easy to show as well. Work culture is unraveling the health of our society because we refuse to acknowledge our need for rest.

In researching for this piece I ran across a number of speculations as to why we allow this to happen. They tend to break one way or the other, depending on the political and economic views of the speculator. One basic fact which I found surprising is that the United States is the only industrialized nation which does not MANDATE paid leave. Even if your employer offers you vacation time, you don't have to take it. In the rest of the world, you aren't allowed to toil until you topple the way you are here. That's interesting, and I'd go into it further, but right now I need to get back to work.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort with today's KINS Community Comment.