



Brian Bebek puts in 55 to 60 hours a week at his job with a Burnaby engineering firm and is accompanied by his dog, Skye, during his long work days. 'He gets mad if I don't take him with me and he lets me know it,' says Bebek. ARLEN REDEKOP/PNG

Harder than ever to work 9 to 5

Wary of layoffs and downsizing, workers are putting in more hours and skipping vacations to protect their jobs

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FEATURES



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Brian Bebek is lucky he loves his job because he'll likely spend much more time doing it this year.

The materials inspector employed by a Burnaby engineering firm worked an average of 55 to 60 hours a week in 2013.

He expects these hours to increase in 2014 as activity ramps up at the large Vancouver building projects where he monitors structural and material quality.

As he drives his pickup from site to site, Bebek is accompanied by Skye, his miniature Australian Shepherd.

Bebek, 39, is nominally the one who gets paid for the job. But two-

year-old Skye appears to believe Bebek can't handle the long days unless he comes along.

"He gets mad if I don't take him with me and he lets me know it," Bebek says.

Bebek sometimes feels as if he's "the only person who spent their professional life running a marathon with no sign of the finish line in sight."

But he and Skye won't be the only B.C. residents to work like dogs this year. Workplace experts predict Canadians will spend more time on the job as workloads mount, people remain nervous about their jobs and employers increasingly expect

employees to answer emails and texts at any time of day.

Welcome to 2014, a year in which many of us, from employees to business owners, will work longer and harder than ever.

When 2013 ended, almost 70 per cent of North Americans had not taken all of their vacation time, says Right Management, which advises companies around the world on workforce issues.

A separate survey by Expedia.ca found that 52 per cent of B.C. residents have cancelled vacations because of work, making them the most likely group of Canadians to do so.

Right Management spokeswoman Margaret-Ann Cole predicts that the big chunk of North Americans who abandon vacation time in 2014 will remain the same.

During the 2008 recession, when companies were laying off large numbers of people, fearful employees felt they had to be tied to their desks, Cole says.

"It became a habit in which fewer and fewer people take vacations. Social media makes it really hard for those who do to turn off and cleanly go on vacation," Cole says.

"People are working longer. They may not be physically in the office but they are taking work home. If you did a poll and asked people, they would answer 'yes,' they are working longer."

Overall family work hours have been on the rise, according to StatsCan. The combined weekly work hours of Canadian couples jumped to 64.8 in 2008 from 57.6 in 1976 — the equivalent of almost another full day of work per week, the federal agency says.

Still, overworked Canadians with good jobs may wish to count their blessings. Carleton University business professor Linda Duxbury says Canada's workforce is splintering into three groups: knowledge workers (professionals and managers) who work long hours; lower-end service-sector workers who cobble together several part-time jobs; and jobless people displaced by automation or outsourcing, unable to find any work for which they're qualified.

The upper and lower ends of the pay spectrum are both working longer, Duxbury says. At the low end, workers stitch different jobs together to make ends meet.

"My data says one in five Canadians has more than one job," she says. "That tends to be people with lower pay who need every available hour to survive."

People at the upper end of the pay scale are not only working longer, they're working harder as employers' demands become more complex, Duxbury says.

Employers want workers to be available throughout the day and night. Work increasingly leaks into family time, forcing parents to "outsource" family responsibilities. They pay for child care, buy meals instead of cook them and send kids to camp rather than take vacations as a family, she says.

Work is intensifying as employees are expected to constantly upgrade their skills, whether or not the company trains them, Duxbury says. And they are being overloaded with difficult tasks.

"We're being expected to do too many things at the same time," she says.

"I hear all the time from people that tell their employers, 'You asked me to do A, B and C and all are due tomorrow. Which do you want me to do first?'"

"The answer is: 'I want you to do all of them.'"

Employers' inability to set priorities and boundaries for employees carries a cost for organizations and individuals, Duxbury and other experts warn.

Work-life balance expert Beverly



'My staff and I work 10 to 12 hours a day, five to seven days a week, which, of course, means less vacation time for us and our families,' says Craig Yee, owner of a Vancouver risk-assessment company. WAYNE LEIDENFROST/ PNG



Deen Hannem works 80 hours a week at her furniture business in Langley but doesn't mind the long days. 'If you set yourself a goal, that's what you have to do,' says Hannem. WAYNE LEIDENFROST/ PNG

Beuermann-King says the consequences of stress caused by overwork range from headaches to heart attacks.

"We see higher rates of burnout and depression and mental illness," Ontario-based Beuermann-King says.

"It can also be something as simple as people being more moody, more edgy, not using the social niceties at work. That can lead to more conflict and that, in turn, has impacts on productivity and absenteeism."

"We see higher rates of burnout and depression and mental illness ... people being more moody, more edgy."

— BEVERLY BEUERMANN-KING
WORK-LIFE BALANCE EXPERT

Small-business owners working more hours, too

Growing competition is driving small-business owners like Craig Yee to work longer hours.

Yee, who employs three people at Vancouver-based OHS Global Risk Solutions, says he tries to outpace the competition by quickly responding to any client who has health and safety concerns.

"The competition in our (health and safety) line of work is higher than ever before," Yee says. "More often than not, my staff and I work 10 to 12 hours a day, five to seven days a week. Which, of course, means less vacation time for us and our families."

On the other hand, Yee tries to give his staff enough flexibility in their schedules to counter the long hours.

Laura Jones, an executive vice-president with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, says competition and red tape are tied for the No. 1 reason that Canadian business owners are working long hours.

Part of the competition comes from former employees who start their own businesses after being laid off, Jones says.

Sixty-two per cent of business owners have coped with the 2008 recession and its aftermath by increasing their hours, CFIB research shows. Twenty per cent have reported working more than 60 hours a week.

Most small business owners don't mind the hours, Jones says. A 2011 survey by CFIB showed 63 per cent of business owners enjoy their work.

In a recent survey commissioned by Regus Canada, Angus Reid found that small business owners and entrepreneurs are the most likely Canadians to take emails, make calls and attend to work while on holiday.

The hours can become too much for some business people.

Work and wellness expert Beverly Beuermann-King says many people start businesses out of a desire to control their own schedules.

When they find themselves working more hours than they did at their jobs, they may lose heart.

"A lot of small-business owners end up going back to working for someone else because they burned themselves out. They didn't pace themselves," Beuermann-King says.

Deen Hannem, who owns Langley-based Revamp Furniture Garage, says she typically works

about 80 hours a week finding, designing and refurbishing furniture.

She expects those hours to increase this year. But Hannem, 50, says she has more than enough energy and passion to handle a greater workload.

"There are so many businesses that do work extra hard," she says. "If you set yourself a goal, that's what you have to do."

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Christian Codrington, a senior manager with the B.C. Human Resources Management Association, suggests that many people have become obsessed with work — and obsessed with appearing to work hard by emailing late in the day or in the wee hours of the morning.

Both of these obsessions blur the borders between work and family life, hurting personal and organizational well-being, he says.

Codrington's association offers organizations the ability to track employees' absences for health or personal reasons.

"Since the inception of the service in 2009, there has been a consistent increase in the average absence from 5.8 days a year to 7.1 days in 2013," Codrington says. "We estimate that for every day lost it costs employers an average of \$371 per day in direct labour and benefit costs."

Robert (his name has been changed to protect his privacy), a mid-level tourism industry worker in Vancouver, says work has consumed his life. In the busy spring and summer season, he works 60 to 90 hours a week. Even a brief vacation is out of the question.

His employer has begun to track his email activity to make sure he remains logged in during his "off" hours.

"I've more or less reached my breaking point," the 40-year-old says. "I'm worn out. You don't have time to see friends or family.

You don't have time to find a new job."

Are those of us lucky to be working doomed to become more like Robert? Will working hours get longer and longer, reaching deeper into what's left of our personal lives?

Duxbury believes that things will get better. Government, rather than bringing in temporary foreign workers, can help jobless and overworked Canadians by re-skilling people — equipping them with the credentials employers need.

There's an enormous opportunity and no time to waste. In five years, the higher-income end of Canada's job market will be short about 800,000 skilled people, Duxbury says. Meanwhile, there's expected to be a surplus of 500,000 people on the unskilled end.

As baby boomers leave the workforce in greater numbers in five to 10 years, skilled employees will become harder to find.

Generation Y, the folks born between 1977 and 1994, will make work-life balance a priority. That will leave Gen Ys in a better position to negotiate limits on hours of work, she says.

"We're just at the beginning of some pretty transformative changes in the workplace," she says. "We'll see the time at work decline for highly skilled people, but we're in a transition period now.

"The transition can be pretty ugly until baby boomers exit the workforce in bigger numbers."

B.C. jobless rate steady while national rate spikes

The unemployment rate in B.C. remained steady in December while the national jobless rate spiked.

British Columbia added 13,000 jobs, according to Statistics Canada. The province gained around 23,000 part-time jobs but that was offset by the 10,000 full-time positions shed.

Statistics Canada says the unemployment rate in B.C. was virtually unchanged at 6.6 per cent as more people participated in the labour market.

The Canadian economy lost a surprising 45,900 jobs in December to finish the weakest year of job growth since 2009, raising concerns about how the economy will fare into 2014.

The national unemployment rate rose to 7.2 per cent in the final month of the year, compared with 6.9 per cent in November.

BMO Capital Markets chief economist Doug Porter said the dismal jobs data will add pressure on the loonie and stoke chatter about the possibility of an interest-rate cut by the Bank of Canada.

The loonie fell half a cent to 91.65 cents US, its lowest level since mid-2009, following the jobs report Friday.

The December drop, the biggest in one month since March 2013, was led by a decline in full-time jobs, which fell by roughly 60,000, offset by a gain of 14,200 part-time jobs.

Economists had expected the economy to add 14,600 jobs and the unemployment rate to hold steady at 6.9 per cent, according to estimates compiled by Thomson Reuters.

Industry Minister James Moore said the jobs report was disappointing, but the government was focused on the bigger picture.

"I think if you step back and look at the overall jobs picture, we still have the strongest job record in all the G7," Moore said in Vancouver.

"The overall picture for the Canadian economy is still very strong."

The drop in the overall number of jobs follows moves by several big companies to cut their workforces late last year.

Smartphone maker BlackBerry, for example, has been shedding jobs following an announcement in September that it would cut its workforce by 40 per cent or about 4,500 people.

Retailer Sears Canada also announced plans in late November to cut 800 employees across its operations.

For the month, Ontario and Alberta led the provinces with job losses of 39,000 and 12,000 respectively.

— *The Canadian Press*

TONIGHT

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HEARTLAND

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