



The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work

By Joanne B. Ciulla

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EXPLORING AND EXPLODING OUR NOTIONS OF WORK

Joanne B. Ciulla, a noted scholar in Leadership and Ethics, examines why so many people today have let their jobs take over their lives. Technology was supposed to free us from work, but instead we work longer hours-often tethered to the office at home by cell phones and e-mail. People still look to work for self-fulfillment, community, and identity, but these things may be increasingly difficult to find in today's workplace. Gone is the social contract where employees and employers shared a sense of mutual loyalty, yet many of us still sacrifice personal time for jobs that we could lose at the drop of a stock price. Tracing the evolution of the meaning of work from Aesop to Dilbert, and critically examining the past 100 years of management practices, Ciulla asks questions that we often willfully ignore at our own peril.

*When you are on your deathbed, will you wish you had spent more time at the office?

*Why do we define ourselves by our jobs rather than by other activities we do outside of work?

*What can employers and employees promise each other in today's business environment?

Provocative and entertaining, **The Working Life** challenges us to think about the meaning of work and its impact on our lives.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Work, for most of us, is something we do, not something we think about. We may wonder whether our work is sufficiently stimulating, whether it brings in enough money, or whether it makes a difference in the grand scheme of things, but we don't often question what, in fact, work really is, and why we work in the first place. In *The Working Life*, Joanne Ciulla asks these critical questions and others, taking a philosophical, sociological, and practical look at the nature of work and its role in our lives today.

As Ciulla points out, we live in a work-oriented society where, even though we have more freedom and flexibility than ever and more tools to increase convenience and efficiency, our work determines our lives. We have "gone beyond the work ethic," she states, to a point where our jobs have become our primary source of identity. To understand this, Ciulla looks at the values we reflect in our choice of jobs and professions, the attitudes we express in our language for work, and the sociohistorical journey that work has taken from cursed necessity to calling. She follows the path of work in our recent past, from unregulated labor and slavery, through unionism, to the rise of the all-encompassing corporation and today's blurred lines between private and public lives. In the final section, Ciulla investigates the role that work plays in our understanding and use of time and our search for meaning.

Now teaching courses on ethics, leadership, and critical thinking at Virginia's University of Richmond, Ciulla has examined and experienced the nature of work from both sides of the managerial divide. After supporting herself through the first nine years of an academic career with bar and restaurant work, she went on to study and teach business ethics at Harvard and Wharton. These varied experiences give the book a balanced and sensitive tone, adding credibility to her insights. She supports and refines her ideas about work with the comments of philosophers, writers, sociologists, economists, management theorists, and even the narratives of popular television shows. Her sources range from Aristotle and the ancient storyteller Aesop to the early-20th-century time-study engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor, the comic strip "Dilbert," and modern-day business gurus. The diversity of perspectives is inspiring and helps--together with Ciulla's own interpretations and clear, precise prose--create a thought-provoking and stimulating look at the nature of work. --S. Ketchum

From Library Journal

Ciulla (Univ. of Richmond) has written a stimulating and thought-provoking book that traces the philosophical and cultural conceptions of work and workers over the years while providing a critical survey of management theories and practices. She explores relationships among various kinds of work, the roles of consumption and leisure, and beliefs about what constitutes meaningful work, a meaningful life, and happiness. She points to Scott Adams's Dilbert cartoons as "probably the best and most accurate critique of what many today think about work" and to labor unions as "the most important innovation in the relationship between employer and employee...because they address the imbalance of power between the two parties." Today, the pressures of our consumption-driven, global economy frequently lead to the compromise of individuals' "higher" values when making decisions affecting the overall quality of their lives. This well-written examination of the meanings of work and life challenges that compromise. Highly recommended for academics and the general public. ASuzanne W. Wood, SUNY Coll. of Technology at Alfred
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Review

"A wonderfully readable tour through the history of ideas about work, as human nature or human condition; as curse or blessing; as a calling by God or expression of the inner self."

-- Michael W. Munley, Philadelphia Inquirer

"None of my guests on World of Ideas stimulated more response from viewers than Joanne Ciulla."

--Bill Moyers, Public Affairs Television, Inc.

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Barry Phelan:

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