

Case 6 ♦ The Slow Movement

While flying back from vacation on a commercial airline, Josh was taken by an article that he read on the in-flight magazine. It discussed the “Slow Movement,” which emphasizes a decreased use of technology, prioritization of issues to only those which are most likely to have lasting impacts, and living in the moment.¹ The author of this article claimed self-improvement and greater happiness in life.

Josh had been feeling overworked and squeezed for time for a while — his smartphone buzzing in his pocket, as he received a constant stream of emails from his boss and coworkers. Thanks to technology, work could barge into Josh’s vacation. Likewise at home, Josh noticed that his long work hours — a necessary sacrifice after the birth of his second child necessitated a higher income— were interfering with his family life. It had been years since he had put his children to bed, and even longer since the last time he and his family sat down for a quiet family dinner with no interruptions. Formerly a college swimmer, Josh was no longer able to swim a lap without going out of breath. It seemed as if every time he tried to start a new exercise routine, his phone would buzz announcing a new crisis at work.

Josh’s experience is anything but unique. As sociologist Juliet B. Schor has documented, “[w]e have paid the price for prosperity. Capitalism has brought a dramatically increased standard of living, but at the cost of a much more demanding worklife...We have color televisions and compact disc players, but we need them to unwind after a stressful day at the office. We take vacations, but we work so hard throughout the year that they become indispensable to our sanity.”²

Thus, Josh decided that he was going to put into practice the lessons of slow living. Immediately, he decided to do away with his smartphone in favor of a more traditional number key phone that lacked Internet connectivity. He decided that he was going to spend more time meditating, walking outside, exercising, and sharing meals with his family. He realized he could not continue to work late, often until 8 p.m. or later, and would need to ensure he came home at the silent 5 o’clock whistle every day.

Within a week, Josh noticed an improvement in his sleep quality and his mood. He felt more connected to his wife and children, whom he saw every night during his family dinners. However, Josh’s coworkers noticed a change too — and they were not happy about it. No longer tethered to his smartphone, Josh ceased to respond to e-mails and phone calls afterhours. Rumors started flying around the office about Josh no longer being a team player. A month after Josh decided to leap into the slow movement, he was called into his boss’ office. Noticing Josh’s apparent declining dedication to the company, his boss threatened to demote him to a position with fewer responsibilities and a smaller paycheck. On his commute back home, Josh wondered if he should abandon his slo-mo approach and revert to his 12-hour workdays.

Case from the 2013 Regional Ethics Bowl. Copyright, Association for Practical and Professional Ethics.

<http://appeonline.com/ethics-bowl/regional-ethics-bowl/>

¹ David Hochman, “Not So Fast,” Spirit Magazine, April 2013,
http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/pace/spirit_201304/index.php?startid=70#/72

² Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American*, New York: BasicBooks, 1992, p. 10-11.