When dying people look back on their lives, there are some common things they wish they had done differently. Not having followed one’s dreams is one common regret. Not having spent enough time with friends and family is another. But one thing people seldom regret on their deathbed is not having worked enough or not having made enough money. We all know there are more important things in life than the rat race, but that doesn’t stop us from spending much of our lives working too much. Too much work not only causes mental stress; it hurts our physical health, too. According to one study that looked at 43 years of data on homemakers, those who took fewer vacations were twice as likely to die of heart attacks. Another study that looked at British civil servants found that those who worked more hours were twice as likely to suffer from depression. Recognizing how detrimental overwork can be, some governments are cracking down. According to the local law in one small town in France, bakers must close at least once a week. Cedric Vaivre ignored the law and is now paying the price. He has been fined 3,000 Euros. Not everyone thinks Cedric is a workaholic though. Christian Branle, the mayor, says, “You have to have a bit of common sense. There’s no competition here. Let people work, in order to cater to visitors who expect the service.” His customers also support him and have started a petition protesting his punishment. On the other hand, union member Eric Scherrer says employment laws must be respected. “These people need to have a rest day each week. We can’t just allow them to work non-stop. It’s absolutely necessary that both bosses and employees have a day of rest.” On the other side of the world, Japanese company Taisei is selling a high tech way of annoying people into stopping work. For about $5,000 a month, Taisei will send flying drones into offices in search of employees who are working too much. The drones will nag people to go home by blaring Auld Lang Syne, a song that is often played in Japanese stores at closing time. They are also equipped with cameras to record the workaholics who refuse to go home.

“I’ve done a good day’s work,” he said. It was only noon, and the bearded scientist’s workday was already over. While it might sound like he was slacking off, the famous scientist did a huge amount of research and wrote 19 books in his career. Charles Darwin worked hard, but he did not work long. He started each day with breakfast and a walk. At about 8 a.m. he’d work hard for a few hours, with a break in the middle to respond to a few letters. At noon, he’d have a leisurely midday walk, then enjoy a nice lunch and respond to a few more letters before taking a nap. After that, came yet another walk and perhaps another hour of work before sitting down to dinner with his family. All in all, he enjoyed a fairly relaxed schedule. He’s not alone. Ernest Hemingway worked 6 hours a day. Stephen King says anything over four hours is “strenuous.” President Theodore Roosevelt enjoyed naps and hobbies in equal measure to his work. In fact, a huge number of historical figures enjoyed days, which might be considered as “lazy” in our productivity-obsessed society. But here’s the kicker, these high achievers weren’t successful despite all their time off. They were successful because of all their time off. Their shortened workday made them more focused and productive. Research suggests that people who work in creative positions are only able to be fully productive for about 6 hours a day. And people can actually be more productive when they work less. The first step to doing more in less time is to get your focus dialed in. Try to invest your attention entirely in the task at hand. That means no multitasking. It’s also important to take breaks. Productivity is increased when people take at least a 15-minute break every couple of hours. But the key is to take a break that actually allows the mind to rest. That means no scrolling through social media or reading the news. Instead, be as deliberate with your downtime as you are with your work. For example, Darwin loved taking walks in nature for his breaks. And don’t shy away from naps. One experiment showed that perception got progressively worse throughout the day unless the subject took naps. If Darwin had worked 40, 60, or even 80-hour weeks, we might never have benefited from his most inspired contributions. Maybe it’s high time that we all take it easy. We might just do our best work when we do less work.