

The Toxic Glorification of Working Hard

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Twitter has lately been awash in ads. I don't mean the normal annoying ads, the ones promoting the latest Disney movie or some upcoming tech conference. I mean a more insidious kind of ad. The kind of ad that strives to steal your time. Ads like this:



Mary
Chicago

Shout-out to all the impressive Lyft parents out there - like Mary, a longtime Lyft driver who was still on the road at nine months pregnant. When contractions persisted, she headed to the hospital - but not before accepting one last request! The next morning, **baby Maven Mia** joined the Lyft family.

On the surface, this little advertisement seems like no big deal: a woman who loves her job was still doing it at nine months pregnant. That kind of tenacity, that dedication to their job, should be celebrated, even revered. Right?

In light of the recent [Uber scandals](#), all its competitor Lyft really needs to do is not screw up and they'll look like an angel by comparison. I don't think this accomplishes that objective.

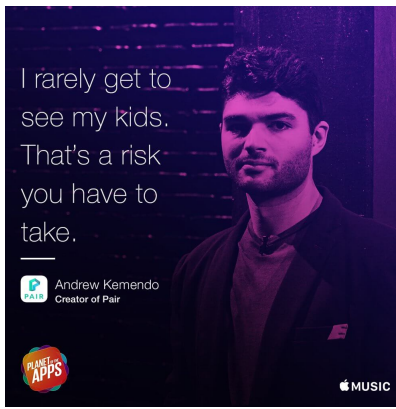
What does Lyft want us to think after we read this ad? What exactly are we celebrating here? Or, rather, who or what is telling us we should be celebrating?

By releasing this ad into the wilds of Twitter, Lyft simultaneously wants us, its consumers, to revere people like Mary and to aspire to be like them. To do what they did. After all, it's people like this, people with outstanding dedication to their job, that get lauded, that get praise and raises and fame and fortune, so these companies would like us to believe.

But we have a right, even a duty, to think for ourselves. And we can think: are those really the people we want to emulate? To be?

They Want Zealots

Here's a slightly more egregious example, from the new Apple podcast *Planet of the Apps*:



There are conflicting reports as to whether Andrew Kemendo actually said this, but it doesn't matter since he, like Mary, is not the bad guy here. It's his life. But why the hell is Apple celebrating this ideology, this insidious thought that in order to succeed, in order to make a product that sells wildly, in order to land an interview on a "prestigious" podcast, you need to give up time with your family. Who wins in that situation? You don't. Your family doesn't.

You know who wins? The companies themselves.

These ads aren't targeted at me. I'm entrenched at my current company, happy with my job and with the work culture. Lyft and Apple aren't trying to get at me. They're trying to recruit the new grads, the ones who hunger for something more, the ones who know that working hard always yields success.

Those companies don't want workers; they want zealots. They want the true believers, the ones that think they're only a step away from greatness, the ones who look at the huge fancy corporate campuses and yearn for a better life, even if that means voluntarily giving up your time in the process. They want the ones who are willing to surrender time for money and glory.

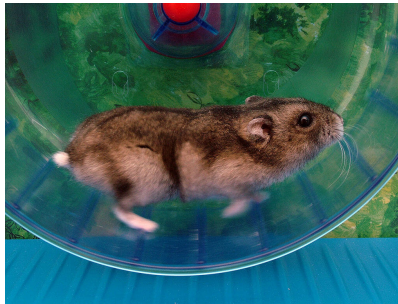
I'm an American, and I hate this part of our culture. The [cult of overwork](#) has grown so large and so entrenched that regular people now look up to people that willingly exchange their time for money. I've overheard people at the [tech conferences I've attended](#) comparing amount of time slept at night. "I only got five hours last night." "Must be nice, I only got

three." It's asinine, this pervasive thought that less sleep and more work equals more dedication. Yet these people are the ones we're supposed to look up to. Why?

Time vs Money

These companies, Lyft and Apple and the like, want us to believe in the acclaim that working long hours will bring. They want us to buy what they're selling: that the way to succeed at life is to work long hours, neglect your family, furiously build that app you've been dreaming of and eventually strike it rich, all while putting in tons of hours and getting little sleep. It's the classic trade-off of time for money, and who doesn't want more money?

These companies take your time, use it up, and throw it away. Sure, they pay you and pay well, but does that make up for the time you lost? None of us are getting out of this alive. How much do you want to work before your time is up?



These ads and these companies are perpetuating a toxic glorification of working hard. Let's be clear: hard work itself is not the problem; the idea that the only way to win at life is to work hard and for a long time is the real issue. These companies keep putting that line of thinking out there, and the only ones that benefit from it are themselves. I hate to be cliché (and so I immediately will be) but no one ever lies on their death bed wishing they'd worked more.

But the final decision is not mine to make. It's yours. How will you spend your time?

As for me? While the zealots are hard at work making the "next big thing", I'll be at home, playing *Zelda* with my boys, having tea parties with my daughter, reading *Harry Potter* to all three kids at night, binging *Orange is the New Black* with my wife, and generally remembering that I only have a limited amount of time in this world and I want to spend it at home, with my family. That's how I'll use my given time, and to me, that'll be time well spent.

Here's hoping we all get the time we need.

Happy Coding!



Matthew Jones

I'm a parent, a husband, a geek, a web developer, and a speaker, in roughly that order.

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OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS **M. Korman** • 7 months ago

It's good to see someone speaking out loudly and bravely against this toxic work ethic. I know where I stand in the "time vs money" choice. In my company you can "buy" up to 3 days of annual leave per year by taking a salary sacrifice. Every year I don't buy those 3 days I consider it a failure in time management.


Remember: you can always make more money, but you can't make more time.

11   • Reply • Share ›**jon49** • 7 months ago

Yeah, I work a pretty strict 40 hour work week. If there is an emergency I'll work more, but only if it happens very rarely. Which means whatever caused the problem will be permanently fixed by me so it doesn't happen again. Having said that; I really enjoy programming and will read articles and program outside of work; but they're my own projects. If I worked more than 40 I would get a second job so I don't lower my "hourly" rate.

But having kids I don't really have time for that, so I don't.

Working more hours than 40 on a regular basis when you are salaried is like going to the grocery store (or any other store for that matter) and saying, "I really like what you guys do here! In fact I like it so much that I'm going to pay you an extra 20% every time I come here!" Doesn't make a whole lot of sense when you look at it that way!

6   • Reply • Share ›**Sotirios Mantziaris** • 7 months ago

So true, i would like to add the fast pacing tech we are working with, which gives us little time to learn something which is already old that steals a lot of time just to keep up!

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isyldar • 7 months ago

"I do not live to work, I work to live." --My father :)

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Noam Fein • 7 months ago

Spot on. I hate hearing about culture and how much fun people are having at work. So much fun that they work tons of hours.

Those things only work on young developers that think they if you have fun at work, you have to work 60 hours.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Franck Quintana • 7 months ago

100% agree.

My two bits:



and <http://www.businessinsider...>

See bottom page of Sergey Brin's resume.

These guys know a lot about business and life quality.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Craig Wagner • 7 hours ago

I'm a little late to the party (got here from your recent 9-to-5 developer post) but thanks for this. For a long time I've marvelled at attitudes like the ones from Twitter and Apple. My theory has always been that people feel like they're always having to prove to their employer how valuable they are by sacrificing their personal lives. Luckily I'm in a position in my life where I don't have to put up with it and I'll leave a toxic environment. Not everyone has that option unfortunately.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

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