

In the past two weeks, the ABA Journal has posted articles entitled “Why Lawyers Should Work No More than 40 Hours a Week” and “Does Money Buy Happiness? Only if You Spend it on Leisure, Research Suggests,” the bottom line to which is that work – focused attention on accomplishing something – should occupy only a sliver of one’s life. I disagree with these rationalizations for sloth.

The idea of a “work/life” balance flows from a false premise. As Melody Hobson put it, “I don’t draw lines in the sand between work and life. When I’m working, I am living.” And dedication to a professional calling takes exactly that – dedication. A 2006 interview by the ABA Journal of Benjamin Sells (former lawyer and psychotherapist; author of *The Soul of the Law*) captured the thought well:

Is there psychological fallout? Sure. But that’s part of it. . . . You’re supposed to get it right, period. I think it’s a legitimate expectation; a lawyer has a huge responsibility to law. And if you think you need a life, or you think that working in law isn’t a life, then it isn’t for you. You are a lawyer, and lawyering is hard. I really believe that you shouldn’t become a lawyer unless it would be a misery to you if you didn’t.

Lincoln, on the practice of law, said “Work, work, work, is the main thing.” A recent survey indicates that most lawyers take 2-3 weeks of vacation per year, and some *much* more, but Shakespeare had it right:

If all the year were playing holidays,  
To sport would be as tedious as to work;  
But when they seldom come, they wished for come.

So have a little compassion for Paris Hilton.

It makes little sense to spend the first 25 years of one’s life trying to become a lawyer, and the rest of one’s life trying to spend as little time as possible working as one. While you should take such time for rest and relaxation as is necessary to continue to function at your best, productive effort – not the avoiding of it – can and should be a source of happiness. As Tertullian advised, “Where our work is, there let our joy be.” And that approach is good for you, as Pablo Casals observed: “The man who works and is never bored is never old. Work and interest in worthwhile things are the best remedy for age.”

The bottom line I leave for a poet:

I slept and dreamt that  
life was joy.  
I awoke and saw that  
life was service.  
I acted and behold,  
service was joy.

Rabindranath Tagore

