

# Does Working Longer Hours Increase Productivity?

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Do you know someone who is “married to their job”? According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the [average full-time worker logs 8.56 hours per weekday and 5.48 hours per day on weekends](#). About half of U.S. workers say they routinely put in 50 or more hours a week. Many workers feel it’s important to put in extra hours to strengthen job security, satisfy cultural demands, or prove their value to the company. The reality is that all that overtime—whether paid or not—is causing employees to become more tired, stressed, inefficient, and likely to make mistakes.

## Testing the limits of concentration

Despite working more than 8 hours a day, research suggests that the [average worker is only productive for 2 hours and 53 minutes](#). In fact, workers spend just as much time reading news websites, checking social media, discussing non-work-related topics, and eating while on the job. Why? Psychologists have found that the brain is unable to focus on tasks for more than a few hours at a time. And when people are pushed past certain limits, it increases the risk they will develop bad habits that infringe on working hours.

## The perils of longer hours

In 2014, Stanford researchers discovered [the “productivity cliff.”](#) The study found that people who put in 70 hours per week produce nothing more than those who put in 55. One reason why productivity tanks as the number of hours increases is that overworked employees often trade sleep for work leading to numerous health problems. As a result, employers see increases in absenteeism, attrition, and health insurance costs.

## Four ways to get the most from your employees

Research is clear that working long hours does not always yield the highest output or efficiency. To ensure your company is getting the most from employees, consider the following options:

1. **Shorten the workweek.** Many companies have already taken the leap to 32 hour weeks, or 4 8-hour days. To maximize worker productivity, research suggests that an even better option is to require 5 6-hour days. Studies have shown that employees feel healthier, take fewer days off, and are more productive in a 30-hour workweek.

2. **Offer breaks during the workday.** Though 30 hour workweeks may be beneficial to some employers, other companies can't justify the added costs of hiring extra staff. Instead, try offering breaks throughout the workday as part of your corporate wellness program. You can provide opportunities to exercise, take a mindfulness class, or eat nutritious food at work.
3. **Encourage employees to enjoy work-free after hours.** Technology has made it easier than ever for employees to check email and continue work on other projects when off duty. Inspire your workforce to resist that temptation and make work-life balance a priority at your company.
4. **Overtime is ok sometimes.** Have a big project or tight deadline? Sometimes working long hours can be productive as long as it doesn't become a habit. It's the constant strain that causes the most stress.

## Find the productivity sweet spot

There are many reasons why workers put in long hours—from cultural expectations and employer demands to individual ambition. However, research shows that consistently logging 50 hours or more each week negatively impacts employees and employers alike.

Encourage organizational leaders to model healthy behavior in terms of work hours, and show managers how to help employees be productive while balancing work and life. Assess employee performance based on merit and accomplishment, rather than extra hours worked. [Asure Software's Performance Management solution](#) can help create a consistent system for appraising employee performance.

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