

Online exclusive

Wasting away the workday

Workers spend an average of 20 percent of shift on non-work activities, survey shows

Hannah Cho On the Job
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Admit it. You spend way too much time surfing the Web or socializing at work.

A new survey says workers waste 20 percent of their workday, or 1.7 hours of an 8.5-hour workday.

The amount of wasted time has declined in the three years since Salary.com began conducting this survey, but the compensation consulting firm says companies are still paying people for no direct benefit.

Among more than 2,000 employees surveyed, 63 percent admitted to wasting time at work, according to the survey. Personal Internet use (34.8 percent), socializing with co-workers (20.3 percent) and conducting personal business (17 percent) rank among the top three activities that cut into work hours.

Marcia Hall, a Severna Park-based author of "Navigating Newbie-ism: 12 Simple Ways to Thrive In Your First Job and Career," says workplace culture can play a part in how much time is wasted and how it's handled by managers.

"Some atmospheres are more laid back and that's their style, and they'll be more flexible. As long as the work is done, they don't care about the hours you put in," says Hall, founder of Reputation COUNTS, which trains business professionals in how to build their reputations. "Other companies care about the hours you work."

Almost 20 percent of employees say they waste time because they don't have enough work to do. That reason is followed by long hours (13.9 percent), being underpaid (11.8 percent) and lack of challenging work (11.1 percent).

The survey also found that workers between ages 20 and 29 waste more time than their older counterparts: 2.1 hours per day.

Hall attributes the survey's finding partly to the myth among younger workers that "it's fine to surf the Net and make a personal phone call if my work is done for the day."

"They are used to being told what to do, rather than taking the initiative and asking what else they can do," Hall says. "Many of the employers I've interviewed have said things like, 'I don't want to have to tell them what to do.'"