



[leadership](#)

The 25-Hour Work Week, And Other Radical Ideas For Better Employee Productivity

“I don’t care when you work, how you work, or where you work.” In an excerpt from her upcoming book, author Rana Florida explores unconventional ideas for letting employees be their best selves.

By: Rana Florida

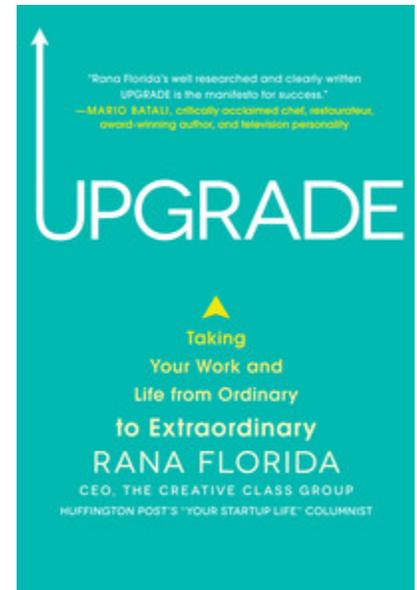


When I began as CEO at the [Creative Class](#), I told my team members that I was not their boss. Early on, I realized the value of changing my vocabulary. Subordinate, employee, and staff became colleague and team, because ultimately that’s what we all are in the workplace.

“Please don’t call me boss, don’t send me approvals like I’m your boss, don’t ask for approval to go on vacation. There is no vacation request form,” I said. “We are all colleagues. You are getting paid for your expertise. I am not going to do performance reviews or expect status reports. It is up to you to manage your own workload, to manage the clients, and to deliver a quality service.”

“I don’t care when you work, how you work, or where you work,” I told them. A few of them did not understand and still wanted to report in to me. I had to constantly remind them not to fill up my inbox with such trifles. “Great, you’re going on vacation with your kids and won’t be checking e-mail,” I’d respond. “Have fun. Find a colleague to manage your clients and make sure your clients know how to reach them.”

I thought about those conversations when I was interviewing [Mayor Richard Daley](#). “I can’t recall many instances when I was mayor where an issue was so crucial that my staff had to awaken me in the middle of the night,” he told me. “I hired very competent managers who knew I expected them to work hard. They knew they couldn’t be afraid to make a decision. Sometimes the decisions were right, and sometimes there should have been a different approach. The important thing is that the decision was made.”



Josh Patrick, the founder and principal at a financial advisory services firm, [told the *New York Times*](#), “One of the things we constantly told employees was the following statement: ‘You are the expert at your job.’ It took several years for some of our people to actually believe it. But I’ve used this mantra in my business life ever since. The key is that when you make this change, you stop telling people what to do and you start asking them their opinion about the best way to get something done. This can produce all sorts of benefits.”

I’ve had bosses who didn’t just want to control my professional time but wanted to be included in my personal life and hang out with my friends and me outside the office. I’ve had bosses who wanted me to give them home and fashion makeovers and who wanted me to host parties with them. I always gave in a bit, thinking this surely was my way to the top. It wasn’t. The more time I gave, the more time they took.

Jason Fried wrote an [op-ed piece for the *New York Times*](#) on managing time at his software company, 37signals:

We take inspiration from the seasons and build change into our work schedule. For example, from May through October, we switch to a four-day workweek. And not 40 hours crammed into four days, but 32 hours comfortably fit into four days. We don’t work the same amount of time, we work less.

Most staff workers take Fridays off, but some choose a different day. Nearly all of us enjoy three-day weekends. Work ends Thursday, the weekend starts Friday, and work starts back up on Monday.

The benefits of a six-month schedule with three-day weekends are obvious. But there’s one surprising effect of the changed schedule: better work gets done in four days than in five.

When there's less time to work, you waste less time. When you have a compressed workweek, you tend to focus on what's important. **Constraining time encourages quality time.**

I've never had an employer who believed in this system. All of them assumed that if you're not sitting at your desk for long hours, you're not really working. Sometimes exactly the opposite is the case. Rather than sneak out early and risk the piercing looks of colleagues and bosses, many an efficient worker will ride out the last hour or so of the day at his or her desk, playing around with Facebook or instant chatting with friends. Being productive does not translate to being busy.

As the productivity expert [Tony Schwartz wrote in a New York Times op-ed](#), the best way to improve employees' productivity is to encourage them to relax. "The importance of restoration is rooted in our physiology," he wrote. "Human beings aren't designed to expend energy continuously. Rather, we're meant to pulse between spending and recovering energy."

In a study of nearly 400 employees, published in 2011, researchers found that sleeping too little--defined as less than six hours a night--was one of the best predictors of on-the-job burnout. A recent Harvard study estimated that sleep deprivation costs American companies \$63.2 billion a year in lost productivity.

Having more vacation time is beneficial. In 2006, the accounting firm Ernst & Young did an internal study of its employees and found that for each additional 10 hours of vacation employees took, their year-end performance ratings from supervisors (on a scale of 1 to 5) improved by 8 percent. Frequent vacationers were also significantly less likely to leave the firm.

Another one of Dan Gilbert's [27 lessons](#) is very much to the point. He says, "Working longer hours does not automatically make you more successful. Working smarter does." Consider the case of Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's COO, who leaves the office at 5:30 every day. "I walk out of this office every day at 5:30 so I'm home for dinner with my kids at 6, and interestingly, I've been doing that since I had kids," she declared in a recent interview. "I did that when I was at Google, I did that here, and I would say it's not until the last year, two years, that I'm brave enough to talk about it publicly."

James Vaupel of the Max Planck Research Center in Denmark believes that everybody should work shorter hours but continue to work well past the traditional age of retirement. "A 25-hour work week will allow younger people to spend more time with their children, take better care of their health (which will help raise average life expectancy), and improve their over-all quality of life," he says, "while for the older population--many of whom have more time on their hands than they know what to do with--work can serve as both a psychological and physical outlet."

--*Rana Florida* is the author of [Upgrade: Taking Your Work and Life from Ordinary to Extraordinary](#). Florida also serves as CEO of [Creative Class Group](#), a consulting firm serving such clients as BMW, Starwood, IBM, Philips, Zappos, and Johnson & Johnson, and writes the *Huffington Post* column "[Your Startup Life](#)."

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