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**Blue snoozers:** Van Gogh's *The Siesta* shows workers taking their regular afternoon rest.

**Is overwork a vice? Many people spend huge amounts of time at the office and then have to deal with work emails at home.**

## What's happening?

It is 9.30 at night and Amira has just left the office.

Then she gets an email from her boss. There is a problem at work. She must sort it out before tomorrow morning, or else!

## Find out more

A recent survey found that junior **lawyers** at one company started work on average at 9.14am and finished at 11.28pm. That adds up to over 70 hours a week — even though the **legal** limit in the UK is 48.

Yet some people take **pride** in working **extreme** hours. Professor Sally Maitlis of **Oxford University** argues<sup>2</sup> that this dates back to a 16th Century idea. The idea was that if you worked hard, it showed you were a good **Christian**.

Then Britain went through the **Industrial Revolution**, which took the idea further.

In the 1980s Britain opened up to big American companies. With them came the idea that making a lot of money was the most important thing in life, and working extremely long hours was the way to achieve that.

In his book *The End of Burnout*, Jonathan Malesic talks of this obsession with work as a kind of **demon**. People need rest too, experts say. And many people are not getting it.

Is overwork a **vice**?

## Some say

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Yes! When we work too much, we forget the things that really matter, such as going outdoors and spending time with our family. Work should be a means to a good life — not your whole life.

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## Others think

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No! Many people love their jobs and find great meaning in them. If you have a skill or talent, you should use it. The real vice is laziness.

## Some people say

*“There can be no joy in living without joy in work.”*

**Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274), Italian theologian**

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*What do you think?*

## Six steps to discovery

### 1. Connect

**How do you feel about this story?** - Do you know someone who works too hard?

### 2. Wonder

**What questions do you have?** - For example: Why do lawyers have to work such long hours?

### 3. Investigate

**What are the facts?** - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure from this story.

### 4. Construct

**What is your point of view?** - You are offered a job that pays a lot of money but means hardly ever seeing your friends. Think about what you would say.

### 5. Express

**What do others believe?** - What job involves the hardest work? Talk about it with your classmates.

### 6. Reflect

**What might happen next?** - Imagine you are told that you have to go to school seven days a week. Write a letter to your head teacher saying why this is a bad idea.

## Glossary

**Lawyers** - People whose job it is to give advice about the law or speak for someone in court.

**Legal** - Something that is legal is allowed by the law.

**Pride** - Feeling of satisfaction or honour about your own achievements.

**Extreme** - Very great, or beyond what is expected.

**Oxford University** - A famous, ancient university in England. There is evidence of teaching as early as 1096, making it the oldest university in the English-speaking world.

**Christian** - A believer in Christianity, a religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ.

**Industrial Revolution** - A period of sudden, rapid industrialisation that transforms a country from an agricultural to an industrial economy.

**Demon** - The devil or an evil spirit.

**Vice** - Immoral or unjustifiable behaviour.