

# When do you stop going to work?

Chris

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As I went to work this week, I looked at all the smoke in the sky and smelt it in my nostrils, and I wondered what it would take for me to stop going to work. So I want to ask you the same questions I have been asking myself. If you have a job and your job isn't vital, how long are you going to go to work? What would make you stop going to work? What would make you say something even more important than making money is going on and that's what I should be doing instead?

Living under a ruling class means we have to work, and under capitalism that's because everything costs money. It's as if the people who own all the food, housing, clothing and everything else you need had a gun to your head and demanded you get money somehow, or they shoot. Well, what if someone else, on your other side, had a gun and said if you get a job, or if you go to work today, they'll shoot? I would probably be immobilized with indecision. Most of us feel the barrel of the first gun, because we have been taught from birth to understand everything costs money, and that to forget that fact means the threat of poverty. But nature is beginning to emerge from the bushes with the second gun, and her demands are huge.

Have you been watching the news? Have you seen all the natural disasters? If you have not yet been affected by them, how long do you think it will be until you are? And when nature's revenge is on your doorstep, will you still go to work?

Hypothetically, would you drive through a hurricane to get to work? If there was a hurricane warning, would you leave work early, even if the boss said you weren't allowed, or would you stay until your shift was over and take the risk? Which gun are you choosing?

Will you work when there are floods outside your office? Or not until your office itself floods? How are you going to get home if that happens? You can't drive home, and you really don't want to walk through flooded streets. They're not rivers. They can have downed power lines, sharp, rusty objects and anything else swept up in the water. And if your office is flooded, your home might be too. You might regret you weren't at home, preparing or evacuating, but you are so used to going to work unless you are physically incapable, it didn't even cross your mind to stay home. Our bosses have us terrified at the thought of putting ourselves before our jobs. Workers already take all the physically risky jobs, while most owners just sit back and watch their piles grow. Workers have been expected to expose themselves to COVID since we knew about COVID. They will always be expected to risk their lives coming in to work, regardless of conditions. I can imagine the calls:

Employee: Hey boss, the streets are pretty flooded today, so I don't think I'll be...

Boss: What, you aren't coming into work? It's like 30 cm. You can't wade to work in 30 cm of water?

Bosses like us to be submissive and accept everything enthusiastically. Police and judges expect us to be scared even to talk back to them. These are bullies. So when asking when it is right to stop going to work or break the law, we are also asking when it is right to stand up to bullies. Most of us have been scared of getting punished by an authority figure from childhood. Authority always has an implied threat attached to it. That's pretty much the nature of authority, at least in this sense of the word: making and enforcing rules on others. Authority doesn't rule for us. They do it for themselves. Defying them is no reason to feel bad. Don't let people guilt you with vague words like "selfish". Yeah, I'm selfish: I want to live. I want to give. And I'm getting old, and I don't want to spend most of the rest of my life working, especially if I'm going to die of lung cancer in ten years.

Will you go to work when there are wildfires around the office? There are more and more wildfires every year. What if they spread near your home when you are at work? What if they set your workplace alight? Then it might be too late. What if, on your way to work, all the trees on one side of the road are on fire. Would you keep driving? What if the fire is mostly just in the next town over? It might spread to you, or they might put it out in time. Would you still go to work? What if that town had to evacuate and your town has doubled in size overnight, and people need food and shelter? Because environmental problems are human problems, and most people are going to survive each disaster. What if all the sidewalks are cluttered with hungry people, like in *Soylent Green*? Or what if they're all in cages, like in *Children of Men*? Which dystopia needs to happen before you change your priorities? When do the needs of people around you supersede those of your boss? When do your own? Or do you not think about your own needs from 9 to 5? Do you only matter in your spare time?

Even when the fires are nowhere near you, the air might still be full of smoke, or some other kind of pollutant (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/feb/11/ohio-train-derailment-wake-up-call>). Now, let's say you *could* do your job from home, but your boss insists you come in. What if you have respiratory problems, possibly as a result of all this pollution? You might have an air purifier at home. You don't want to go outside, least of all to sit in traffic, which means even more smog in your face. But the boss says, go in to work. Are you still going? This is a question a growing number of people are faced with.

I think it's okay to be selfish, to care about yourself, but I think if we come from the perspective of the community, we can serve everyone's interest. I would have thought wearing a mask indoors in public would be in everyone's interest, but most people take their cues from the media they consume, so they don't feel the need to mask up, even though COVID is still circulating and mutating, along with flu and RSV. Would you go to work with COVID? You might get others sick. I told my boss I had COVID and asked for two weeks off, and he said state medical institutions like the CDC (which of course work for the same bosses and landlords as the rest of the state) say you can go back to work after only five days. Well, at five days, I was still sick. So what then? Fortunately, I wasn't scheduled to work for another week, and I wore a KN95 mask just in case, but if I had been expected to work when I could have got others sick I would have had a tough decision to make: whether to say no and risk getting fired, or go in and risk spreading COVID.

If you want to be selfless, great, but don't limit yourself the way some people do. The most selfless thing a lot of people do is take care of their family, and that's great, but I don't really get

why our understanding of family or who we should care about is limited to parents and children. People are expected to ONLY care about their families, while caring about others is frowned upon as a waste of time and money. It feels like we only care about people because we have to. But our lives depend on other people. That is especially so during a crisis. It's in our interest to help others as much as it's in the interest of the people we help. I think the more we help others in their time of need, the more people will be there to help us when we need it too. And that time is coming.

If there are a bunch of evacuees or refugees or, for that matter, homeless people in your town, this would be the perfect time to practice mutual aid. In an emergency, mutual aid might just mean getting people to safety or getting stuff to the people who need it. But you could use the opportunity to organize more long-term mutual aid, so people are not just victims but are empowered to work together to solve their problems. Or is it more important that you ensure your client receives that shipment of widgets on time?

At what point do we abandon unnecessary work when we are in crisis? At what point does the money lose all value in the face of more immediate concerns?

When will we realize the compulsion to work is driving climate change as much as anything else? Most of the human drivers of environmental catastrophes, from logging to piloting private jets, are being carried out daily by law-abiding, tax-paying citizens who just want what is right for themselves and their families. In working for their benefit, they have condemned their grandchildren to an uninhabitable wasteland. I don't blame them, though. They didn't design this system. They're not the ones forcing everybody to work. They're just trying to get by like the rest of us.

But what if they couldn't get to work? What if the streets that led to where they worked were blocked off? What if their offices were knocked down when no one was in them, or some people, possibly the employees themselves, staged an armed occupation of the offices, so no one could work? What if we did stuff like that all around the world, shutting down the biggest polluters? I'm sure you could figure out what to do in your context. We could slow down the advance of climate change, which would mean fewer disasters and crop failures and deaths. It's happening. It's called direct action. More and more people are braving getting fired and going to prison for a broader self-interest. If enough of us join with the right ideas, like mutual aid and direct action, we could actually change things. Isn't it worth a try?

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