

On Work and Leisure



Give me a place to stand, and I shall move the earth.

—Archimedes¹

Give me a place to sit, and I shall watch.

—Anonymous²

I like work: it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours.

—Jerome K. Jerome, 1889

Somebody has to do something, and it's just incredibly pathetic that it has to be us.

—Jerry Garcia, 1988

We can't all be heroes because somebody has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by.

—Will Rogers³

The reason why worry kills more people than work is that more people worry than work.

—Robert Frost, 1914

Science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all - the apathy of human beings.

—Helen Keller, 1927

The gods help them that help themselves.

—Aesop⁴

¹As quoted by Pappus of Alexandria (in ~340 AD).

²Sometimes "attributed" to an "Archimedes' friend".

³As quoted, without a date, by Jacob Morton Braude in 1969.

⁴From his fable *Hercules and the Wagoner*, written in the mid-fifth century BC.

Nothing venture, nothing have.

—*French proverb*

Try to turn every disaster into an opportunity.

—*John D. Rockefeller*⁵

When opportunity knocks, open the door.

—*European proverb*

Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.

—*Thomas Edison*⁶

What the country needs is dirtier fingernails and cleaner minds.

—*Will Rogers*⁷

One cannot, in any shape or form, depend on human relations for lasting reward. It is only work that truly satisfies.

—*Bette Davis*, 1962

All work is noble; work is alone noble.

—*Thomas Carlyle*, 1843

The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.

—*Anonymous*⁸

It takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!

—*Lewis Carroll*, 1865

All that is human must retrograde if it do not advance.

—*Edward Gibbon*, 1776

He who does not move forward, goes backward.

—*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*, 1797

The world belongs to the energetic. Every great and commanding moment in the annals of the world is the triumph of some enthusiasm.

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1876

⁵As quoted, without a date, by Peter Collier and David Horowitz in 1937.

⁶As quoted, without a date, by John L. Mason in 1990.

⁷As quoted, without a date, by A. S. Migs Damiani in 1998.

⁸This maxim, whose unauthored versions may be found in press at least as early as in 1925, was later paraphrased by many, including Vince Lombardi.

Nature is entirely neutral; she submits to him who most energetically and resolutely assaults her. She grants her rewards for the fittest.

—*William Graham Sumner*, 1880

Act [...] when and where you want to, but do it with all your might.

—*J. D. Salinger*, 1957

Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult.

—*Charlotte Whitton*, 1963

Sure [Fred Astaire] was great, but don't forget that Ginger Rogers did everything he did... backwards, and in high heels!

—*Bob Thaves*, 1982

Women who seek to be equal with men lack ambition.

—*Timothy Leary*, 1987

[A woman] needs to know how to look like a girl, act like a lady, think like a man, and work like a dog.

—*Caroline K. Simon*, 1959

A certain amount of opposition is a great help to a man. Kites rise against, not with, the wind.

—*John Neal*, 1848

To reach the source, one has to swim against the current.

—*Stanislaw Jerzy Lec*, 1962

Only dead fish swims with the stream.

—*Malcolm Muggeridge*, 1966

What does not kill me, makes me stronger.

—*Friedrich Nietzsche*, 1888

A pike is in the sea to keep a crucian alert.

—*Russian proverb*

Fortune helps the bold.

—*Virgil*, ~19 BC

Diligence is the mother of good fortune.

—*Miguel de Cervantes*, 1615

No victor believes in chance.

—*Friedrich Nietzsche*, 1882

Where observation is concerned, chance favors only the prepared mind.

—*Louis Pasteur*, 1854

The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest of navigators.

—*Edward Gibbon*, 1776

Readiness is the mother of luck.

—*Baltasar Gracián*, 1647

I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it.

—*Stephen Leacock*, 1910⁹

The only thing that overcomes hard luck is hard work.¹⁰

—*Harry Golden*, 1955

We should be taught not to wait for inspiration to start a thing.

—*Frank Tibolt*¹¹

Inspiration does exist, but it must find you working.

—*Pablo Picasso*¹²

Aspiration creates inspiration.

—*Edward Abbey*, 1990

Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration.

—*Thomas Edison*, 1902¹³

Sweat makes good mortar.

—*German proverb*

Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together.

—*Vincent van Gogh*, 1882

The steady drip of water causes stone to hollow and yield.

—*Lucretius*, first century BC

⁹Frequently misattributed to Thomas Jefferson.

¹⁰This advice looks problematic: for most people, hard work is also hard luck.

¹¹From his book *A Touch of Greatness*, whose 2nd edition was published in 1981. (The first one was published either in the 1940s or in the 1950s.)

¹²As quoted, without a date, by Tomas R. Villasante in 1994.

¹³Starting from 1898, Edison offered several versions of this famous line, with the “inspiration” fraction alternating between one and two percent.

You can go a long way after you have got tired.

—*French proverb*

By perseverance the snail reached the ark.

—*Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1869*

Perseverance is a great element of success. If you only knock long enough and loud enough at the gate, you are sure to wake up somebody.

—*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1887*

It is always darkest just before the dawn.

—*Thomas Fuller, 1650*

Everything has an end – except a sausage, which has two.

—*Danish proverb*

It is pleasant to remember what was hard to endure.

—*Italian proverb*

The greater the effort, the greater the glory.

—*Pierre Corneille, 1642*

Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not.

—*Thomas Henry Huxley, 1877*

Wisdom is knowing what to do next, [...] virtue is doing it.¹⁴

—*David Starr Jordan, 1898*

Who will not when he can, cannot when he will.

—*European proverb*

Do what you can, with what you've got, where you are.

—*Bill Widener*¹⁵

Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well.

—*Lord Chesterfield, 1746*¹⁶

¹⁴There are several later paraphrases of Jordan's first sentence, along the following line: "The only practical question in life is: what to do next?"

¹⁵Often misattributed to Theodore Roosevelt, who just quoted this maxim (with a reverent reference to Widener) in 1913.

¹⁶Possibly based on the Latin maxim "*Age Quod Agis*", literally meaning "Do what you are doing".

Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of intelligent effort.

—*John Ruskin*, 1853

It is just the little touches after the average man would quit that make the master's fame.

—*Orison Swett Marden*¹⁷

People forget how fast you did a job - but they remember how well you did it.

—*Howard W. Newton*¹⁸

Quick and well seldom go together.

—*European proverb*

Perfection is the dream of imperfection that refuses to wake up.

—*Fausto Cercignani*, 2004

Good is the enemy of perfect.¹⁹

—*European proverb*

If you want a thing done well, do it yourself.

—*European proverb*²⁰

Take everything you like seriously, except yourselves.

—*Rudyard Kipling*, 1928

There are people who think that everything is sane and sensible that is done with solemn face.

—*Georg Christoph Lichtenberg*²¹

You must not think me necessarily foolish because I am facetious, nor will I consider you necessarily wise because you are grave.

—*Sydney Smith*, 1840

You've achieved success in your field when you don't know whether what you're doing is work or play.

—*Warren Beatty*, 2004

Play by the rules, but be ferocious.

—*Bill Bowerman*²²

¹⁷Included, without a date, into all recent collections of his works.

¹⁸As quoted, without a date, in several reliable sources, starting not later than 1945.

¹⁹Not very surprisingly, the reversed version of this proverb is even more popular.

²⁰This may be just a popular paraphrase of a longer line by Heinrich Bullinger.

²¹From his *Notebook E* (1775-1776).

²²Frequently misattributed to Phil Knight, who just quoted (with a reverent reference) Bowerman, his own athletic coach and business partner.

To play it safe is not to play.

—Robert Altman²³

A ship in harbor is safe – but that is not what ships are built for.

—John Augustus Shedd, 1928²⁴

To love what you do and feel that it matters – how could anything be more fun?

—Katharine Graham, 1994

Real joy comes not from ease or riches or from the praise of men, but from doing something worthwhile.

—Wilfred Grenfell²⁵

The only thing that may bring joy is work.

—Louis Pasteur, 1940

Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.

—Theodore Roosevelt, 1903

Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.

—Anonymous²⁶

I never did a day's work in my life. It was all fun.

—Thomas Edison²⁷

The test of a vocation is the love of the drudgery it involves.

—Logan Pearsall Smith, 1931

Too much rest is rust.

—Walter Scott, 1825²⁸

Rest's for a clam in a shell.

—Dorothy Parker, 1944

The prospect of a long day at the beach makes me panic.

—Phillip Lopate, 1994

A perpetual holiday is a good working definition of hell.

—George Bernard Shaw, 1910

²³As quoted, without a date, in several generally reliable collections, starting not later than 1978.

²⁴Sometimes misattributed to William Greenough Thayer Shedd (1820-1894).

²⁵As quoted, without a date, in several reputable sources, starting not later than 1967.

²⁶Frequently misattributed to Confucius.

²⁷As quoted, without a date, in a 2003 collection published by *Edison and Ford Winter Estates*.

²⁸Actually, Scott represented that maxim as a line from an “old song”.

No man needs a vacation so much as the man who has just had one.

—*Elbert Hubbard*, 1904

Idleness attracts vices.

—*Saint Bernard*²⁹

Idle man does not know what it is to enjoy rest, for he has not earned it.

—*John Lubbock*, 1913

An idle brain is the devil's workshop.

—*English proverb*

Blessed is the person who is too busy to worry in the daytime and too sleepy to worry at night.

—*Anonymous*³⁰

Man is so made that he can only find relaxation from one kind of labor by taking up another.

—*Anatole France*, 1881

A change is as good as a rest.

—*English proverb*

Nobody who's really using his ego, his real ego, has any time for any goddam hobbies.

—*J. D. Salinger*, 1957

It is impossible to imagine Goethe or Beethoven being good at billiards or golf.

—*Anonymous*³¹

To be able to fill leisure intelligently is the last product of civilization, and at present very few people have reached this level.

—*Bertrand Russell*, 1930

There is no public entertainment which does not inflict spiritual damage.

—*Tertullian*, ~197 AD

Pleasures steal away the mind.

—*Dutch proverb*

²⁹As quoted, without a date, by Geoffrey Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales* (written between 1387 and 1400).

³⁰I have seen this aphorism attributed to Leo Aikman, but could not find a reliable confirmation of his authorship.

³¹Broadly (and very plausibly) attributed to H. L. Mencken, but I was unable to find a reliable confirmation of his authorship.

Amusement is the happiness of those who cannot think.

—*Alexander Pope*, 1727

Every useless amusement is an evil for a being whose life is so short and whose time is so pressing.

—*Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 1762

Everything considered work is less boring than amusing oneself.

—*Charles Baudelaire*, 1864

When men are rightly occupied, their amusement grows out of their work.

—*John Ruskin*, 1865

Free time is an illusion. It's what you get when you die and the gods reward you for a life spent working from dawn until midnight.

—*Tamora Pierce*, 1983