

## The 40 Hour Work Week

Statistically the average hours per week worked in the U.S. is 38.6 hours according to 2015 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This seems very skewed from my perspective. The data by age group is:

Age	Hours
Age 16-19:	22.6
Age 20-24:	36.4
Age 25-54:	42.8
55 and Over:	40.3

A [Gallup Poll](#) shows it is actually 47 hours per week. I tend to agree with this more.

There used to be the perception that becoming a “salaried” employee was the way to go. Simply get paid for 40 and only work 35. When I was a salaried employee, I know the case. I usually hit my 40 by Thursday morning. Even hourly employees in especially in healthcare don’t seem to work 40 hours per week. What has happened and what has changed. The work-life balance is definitely becoming more skewed.

In my observations as a consultant, I see more and more people hourly and salary work on the weekends. Something else that would make HR departments cringe. I know many hourly employees, who simply work off the clock to get the job done. The 40 you see is not what they are putting. Teachers have done this for years, but now this is commonplace in many job sectors especially healthcare.

One of the major issues is unrealistic expectations. Productivity models, especially in healthcare, have set this stage. They see that you hit the benchmark this year and then expect you to do the same with 4% less next year. With FTE reductions there is more work for every one person on average. Work takes time if there is a benchmark for an intended result. This formula promotes burnout and increases the likelihood of an accident. People become fixated on task completion and deadlines and may cut corners or skip steps to get it done on time. I often see an upswing in this when a new manager or director takes over a department or was moved from another department. They have their goals and agendas, but really have no clue on how things have been, so they just dump it on top. In their minds, they are pushing the team to the next level when they are in most cases killing it. You can’t expect to get the same amount of juice from an orange the second time it is squeezed. And getting the last drop every time is not sustainable over time.

Fear and culture are the second biggest cause of the 50+ hour work week. People more than ever need their job for the money and even more importantly the health insurance. The culture in most industries is that everyone is replaceable. So, people generally know if they can or cannot take on more task but do not say “no,” out of fear that if they do they will be fired. The younger workforce has figured out that the institution often expects a high level of loyalty from its employees but doesn’t always reciprocate. Our sacrifice of giving more has set a precedence and become the “norm” expectation.

Big misconception: working from home would be so easy. This is definitely not true. Email and cell phones have made it nearly impossible to disconnect. Always available all the time. When was the last time you went on vacation without a cell phone? There is actually vacation anxiety. Many begin to think about how full their inbox is getting on day 3 of vacation, so they start checking it and answering emails. If they do this, they won’t be so overloaded when they return from work.

This epidemic is impacting home life, personal health, client/patient safety and quality of the work output.

So with that in mind, when was the last time you worked a 40 hour week?