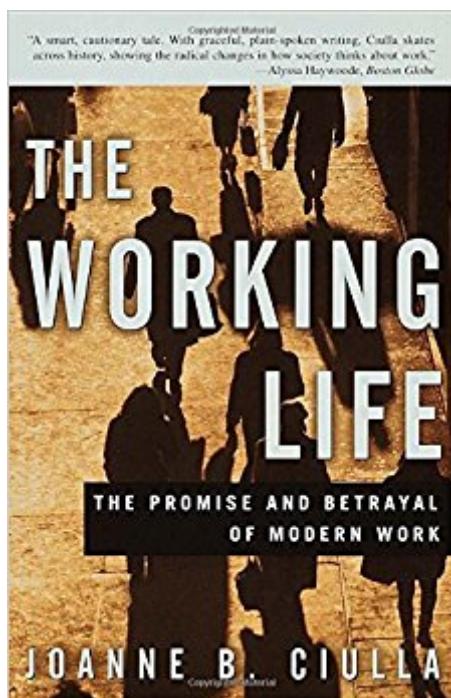


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# The Working Life: The Promise And Betrayal Of Modern Work



## **Synopsis**

EXPLORING AND EXPLODING OUR NOTIONS OF WORK Joanne B. Ciulla, a noted scholar in Leadership and Ethics, examines why so many people today have let their jobs take over their lives. Technology was supposed to free us from work, but instead we work longer hours—often tethered to the office at home by cell phones and e-mail. People still look to work for self-fulfillment, community, and identity, but these things may be increasingly difficult to find in today's workplace. Gone is the social contract where employees and employers shared a sense of mutual loyalty, yet many of us still sacrifice personal time for jobs that we could lose at the drop of a stock price. Tracing the evolution of the meaning of work from Aesop to Dilbert, and critically examining the past 100 years of management practices, Ciulla asks questions that we often willfully ignore at our own peril.\*When you are on your deathbed, will you wish you had spent more time at the office?\*Why do we define ourselves by our jobs rather than by other activities we do outside of work? \*What can employers and employees promise each other in today's business environment? Provocative and entertaining, *The Working Life* challenges us to think about the meaning of work and its impact on our lives.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Work, for most of us, is something we do, not something we think about. We may wonder whether our work is sufficiently stimulating, whether it brings in enough money, or whether it makes a difference in the grand scheme of things, but we don't often question what, in fact, work really is, and why we work in the first place. In *The Working Life*, Joanne Ciulla asks these critical questions and others, taking a philosophical, sociological, and practical look at the nature of work and its role

in our lives today. As Ciulla points out, we live in a work-oriented society where, even though we have more freedom and flexibility than ever and more tools to increase convenience and efficiency, our work determines our lives. We have "gone beyond the work ethic," she states, to a point where our jobs have become our primary source of identity. To understand this, Ciulla looks at the values we reflect in our choice of jobs and professions, the attitudes we express in our language for work, and the sociohistorical journey that work has taken from cursed necessity to calling. She follows the path of work in our recent past, from unregulated labor and slavery, through unionism, to the rise of the all-encompassing corporation and today's blurred lines between private and public lives. In the final section, Ciulla investigates the role that work plays in our understanding and use of time and our search for meaning. Now teaching courses on ethics, leadership, and critical thinking at Virginia's University of Richmond, Ciulla has examined and experienced the nature of work from both sides of the managerial divide. After supporting herself through the first nine years of an academic career with bar and restaurant work, she went on to study and teach business ethics at Harvard and Wharton. These varied experiences give the book a balanced and sensitive tone, adding credibility to her insights. She supports and refines her ideas about work with the comments of philosophers, writers, sociologists, economists, management theorists, and even the narratives of popular television shows. Her sources range from Aristotle and the ancient storyteller Aesop to the early-20th-century time-study engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor, the comic strip "Dilbert," and modern-day business gurus. The diversity of perspectives is inspiring and helps--together with Ciulla's own interpretations and clear, precise prose--create a thought-provoking and stimulating look at the nature of work. --S. A. Ketchum --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Ciulla (Univ. of Richmond) has written a stimulating and thought-provoking book that traces the philosophical and cultural conceptions of work and workers over the years while providing a critical survey of management theories and practices. She explores relationships among various kinds of work, the roles of consumption and leisure, and beliefs about what constitutes meaningful work, a meaningful life, and happiness. She points to Scott Adams's Dilbert cartoons as "probably the best and most accurate critique of what many today think about work" and to labor unions as "the most important innovation in the relationship between employer and employee...because they address the imbalance of power between the two parties." Today, the pressures of our consumption-driven, global economy frequently lead to the compromise of individuals' "higher" values when making decisions affecting the overall quality of their lives. This well-written examination of the meanings of work and life challenges that compromise. Highly recommended for academics and the general

public. ASuzanne W. Wood, SUNY Coll. of Technology at Alfred Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

For those of us who truly enjoy our jobs, despite difficulties and challenges, this book is truly enlightening in helping us to understand the factors that influence our approach to life and its components in general. Whether we work because we must (which indeed is the case for most of us), or because it is stimulating, rewarding or fulfills our inner yearning for depth and meaning is rooted not only in our own psyches, but also in our cultures, traditions, upbringing, etc. In *The Working Life*, Joanne Ciulla explores the nature of work, examining the concept the holistic (my word) nature of work from the practical to the philosophical factors that play into our approach to "earning our daily bread." The author asserts that ours is a society in which we are defined by what we do as much as who we are. We have progressed beyond the traditional Protestant Work Ethic to a point where our jobs often become our primary identity. Whereas some "work to live," more and more of us "live to work" where work is not just a means to an end, but an ultimate end in itself. Ms. Ciulla, a teacher on leadership, critical thinking and ethics at the University of Richmond, has analyzed the concept of work from the perspective of both management and the managed. Given her diversified work experience, the book is expectedly balanced and even, providing a comprehensive view toward the nuances of the work experience. I particularly enjoyed the wealth of supporting references ranging from philosophers, storytellers, management experts, so-called efficiency experts, modern day management theorists and even cartoon characters to flesh out her concepts, yet she presents these as part of her own creative synthesis. "*The Working Life*" is written with and engaging and thoughtful prose, flowing quickly and ending all too soon. It is time well spent and may give the reader additional insight into what makes them "tick" with respect to both the working life and to their whole being.

Excellent book, before you read this book you have to read "*CANNED: How I Lost Ten Jobs in Ten Years and Learned to Love Unemployment*", then when you get to this book you'll understand that much of what you think about work as a living is a lie. This book cover all details: history, philosophy, ideologies, more history, I honestly say that this book is a great cornerstone in the books over the topic of work and all of the aspects which humanity has gone through: management, exploitation, industrial revolution, end of real work, beginning of useless toil, etc. This book is going to be a time capsule by itself, a piece of art, you will learn and learn, and go over moments of history you never ever imagined, it is like if all of the work centered books have been condensed into this

one, worth a read, highly recommended.

Never at any time in our past have work and workplaces been such an integral part of our lives - often forming our very identities. Because of the centrality of work in our lives, the author conducts a wide-ranging examination of work including basic definitions and a brief historical look even to ancient times, its potential for providing meaning to our lives, and the control that employers have over the nature of work and the organization of workplaces. As the author points out, work was once under the control of craftsmen, who worked to produce a complete product irrespective of the specific time needed. With the industrial revolution that manner of working was completely undermined as factory owners gained control by breaking manufacturing into a sequence of simplistic, timed steps to be performed by workers with minimal training, in essence bypassing skilled craftsmen. But the high-speed, dead-end nature of that work was problematical, resulting in massive turnover and no commitment on the part of employees, not to mention the formation of unions. Employers in the 1920s began a counter offensive by adopting a human relations approach geared to inducing willing compliance to perform deadening jobs. As part of that approach, businesses provided increased benefits for employees. Consumerism was promoted as the means to produce the meaning in lives lacking in the workplace. Employers have in more recent times pushed such initiatives as creating a family-like corporate culture (IBM), work teams for purposes of employee participation and empowerment, and promoting total quality management (TQM) to closely bind workers to companies and their agendas, especially white-collar workers. Many social critics, including C. Wright Mills, view these programs as mere manipulation of employees, creating conforming, compliant organization men. There was the assumption that corporate and employee interests were one and the same and that loyalty and trust best described the new employment relationship. The superficiality of this new social compact was brought home in a devastating manner beginning in the early 1990s as corporations supposedly under the dictates of global markets unceremoniously shed thousands of loyal employees. These newly downsized companies were said to be re-engineered - more management speak for unilateral actions. Employee empowerment turned out to be a cynical ploy to be discarded at the first convenient opportunity. Given the utter lack of concern on the part of employers to providing long-term employment, the author chides those who continue to look to places of employment to provide the fulfillment normally provided by family, friends, and communities. She notes that unions are the only workplace organizations that have ever provided a basis for fairness and justice in contrast to the informality of implied agreements easily withdrawn by management. The book is disappointing

because having clearly assessed the state of employment in the US, the author does virtually nothing in recommending change, other than to state the obvious that employers are unreliable in terms of providing security and meaning. At the least, she could have outlined the European approach of works councils and active employment policies. European workers long ago realized that employers cannot be allowed to act with impunity when their economic well-being is at stake. The American system of employers arbitrarily turning workers' lives upside down with no avenue for effective worker input is unconscionable. The book is a well-written, lively overview of the state of working in America. She notes others have described the internals of workplaces, most notably the Dilbert cartoons. She also notes the lack of community among workers, who prefer to adopt cynical self-coping approaches to modern work instead of collaborating to change it. In the face of the obvious employer disregard for employee well-being, the passivity of American workers is baffling.

This is a rare find among books about work. I feel that I cannot recommend it too highly. She looks at work from the perspective of the worker, an individual with the right to consider his/her own interests, not of the manager who tries to convince his subordinates that the company is in right next to God and Country as an institution deserving blind, unselfish loyalty and sacrifice. Ciulla makes assertions that are far too daring for the average management "guru": people are different, managers are not all well-meaning, competent and fair. She reviews the history of attitudes toward work and scathingly points out that many experiments in enlightened management worked very well--right up until the company double-crossed the workers.

The book was in good condition and a great buy for the money.

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