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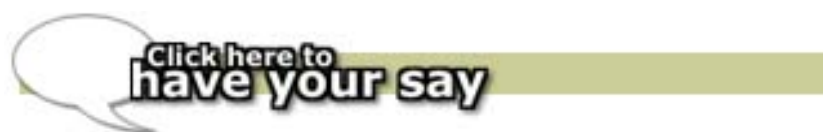


Do you ever catch yourself daydreaming about starting a rewarding new life away from the stresses and strains of work?

Increasing numbers of professionals are packing in their high-powered jobs and volunteering as charity workers abroad, according to research by the Voluntary Service Overseas.

Are you fed up with materialism and greed? Are we moving towards a more caring and sharing society?

Would you give up your well-paid job and cosy lifestyle to work for free helping others in a developing country? Send us your views and experiences.



IN short YES! Having just been told I'm being made redundant again for the second time in four years one has to ask the question what has it ever given me? Stress, insecurity, fear, etc. and for what? To be part of an economic system that slowly, but surely, is destroying the social, cultural and environmental fabric of the world for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many. All that really matters are the people we love, the rest is as disposable as the throwaway society we live in...

Richard Alonzo, UK

I too was once out there worrying, stressing myself out then something wonderful happened to me... I had a heart attack! Now I am poorer than I have ever been, I have less 'friends' than I have ever had and I live a simple, basic, contented, happy life. This capitalist system that we belong to demands that we are a part of it, worrying about it, caring about it. When you find the strength to break away, life is wonderful. Remember, there are

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no pockets in shrouds, so don't worry, be happy.

Mike, UK

I find it very interesting that most of the unease with life appears to emanate from the UK and USA. Given that the UK is part of Europe and many people are leaving the UK for France, Spain etc, perhaps the answer would be for us to move towards the social and more caring societies currently existing in the EU rather than the dog eat dog society of the USA.

Mark, UK

I worked for 8 years in London, living and working amongst the stress, dirt, pollution and the constant go, go go of London life. I got asthma from the pollution and the stress. Then one day I was watching EastEnders, when Ethel said to Michelle "Life is not a dress rehearsal". So I did my TEFL course, found a job and have been living in Brazil for 4 years.

My new environment consists of palm trees, coconut water, beautiful sandy beaches and hot warm sunshine....better environment, no stress, no rush-hour and a lovely beach to relax on at the weekends.

Sue, Brazil/Scotland

During the past 4 years I have been a steady visitor to Uzbekistan. I do not help "natives." I help those people there to deal with people who go there to "help natives." And now that I've retired, I will go there for longer periods and help the craftsmen and the artisans and the small business people to organise and produce and sustain themselves in a culturally sensitive manner. I regret that I was a coward to not do it earlier in life.

Loukas Loukopoulos, USA

WE have been deluded into thinking that having a materially high standard of living means having a good quality of life. And once we attain a reasonable high standard of living we have to work hard to pay for it and thus we are caught up in a vicious cycle. It's probably best not to get stuck into that rut in the first place. So far I have managed to live a simple life which I am happy with by not being so materialistic in the first place. I can afford to take a low stress job, work 6 hours a day and take time off when I want to.

Jasmine Guha, Texas, USA

Take a look at www.whywork.org

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There are no pockets in shrouds, so don't worry, be happy.

”

Mike, UK

“

I gave up a well-paid job, I don't earn anything like as much as I used to. But I'm happy, healthier and more sun-tanned.

”

Sue, Brazil/Scotland

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Chris Davis, UK

Yes it would be nice to get out of the rat race but unfortunately the labour government decided to introduce IR35 and now that early retirement from the rat race is long gone.

Giuseppe Gruosso, UK

As a wise man once told me, it ain't how much you make . . . it's how much you spend. You young folks hanging on by your fingernails while you try to get the means to escape to a decent life. But chop the expenditures to a bare minimum and you'll find a life sooner.

Don Kenyon, Nebraska, USA

"Even if you win the 'rat race', you are still a rat..." - But what is winning ? Does helping and saving the needy from suffering make you a loser ? Almost certainly not, but unfortunately I am a rat!

Bruno, UK

The decision was thrust upon me when I was made redundant. Before I was made redundant I thought my world would end. When it happened it felt like a load had been lifted off my shoulders and I got on with what I wanted to do in life. I set up an expedition to circumnavigate Australia with camels to raise awareness of endangered species in Australia and worldwide and we raise funds for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. It is tough at times but I am doing what I want to do and it makes it a whole lot easier to keep going. The first step as they say is always the hardest!

Alex Bannister, Australia

I'll quit the rat-race ... just as soon as I've made enough out of it ...

Phil, UK

The comments of 'Simon - UK' are just the sort that people are becoming tired of when they think about opting out of the corporate western world. In his arrogant eyes, nowhere else matters except our so-called 'civilised' part of the globe! Who does he think he is, calling people who genuinely want to make a difference in poorer parts of the world, lazy!! Helping a developing area to have clean water, basic accommodation or whatever, is far more worthwhile than screaming at the top of your voice all day selling shares for the good of the VERY few, or any such job in this selfish society we live in.

Jan, UK

One step at a time! Its not just money: there's quality of life to take into account. After 15 years with all of the other lemmings who commute every day, I've decided that the 80 working days a year that I spend on the M4 just going to and from the office could be better spent working closer to home. 40 days for me...40 for the company: everyone wins, not to mention one more car off the road!

Simon Watson, England

As tempestuous as the rat race is, sometimes I wish I had not only the courage, but the economic capacity to just up and go. I salute those who have cast off these shackles in spite of everything.

Dkhuta, USA

As the baby-boomers cycle through the demographic snake, the thought that they will eventually be ejected as waste matter both annoys and frightens them! Better to get out before the inevitable

...

Mark M. Newdick, USA/UK

Through personal experience, I can only agree that chasing high-paid jobs is not always the solution for happiness, but sometimes it works. Stress is self-inflicted. There are plenty of people in low-paid jobs who have equivalent stress. Getting out of the Rat-Race does not necessarily mean you quitting everything becoming a voluntary worker in Africa; It just means balancing your ambition against your happiness.

JB, UK

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Getting out of the Rat Race does not necessarily mean you quitting everything becoming a voluntary worker in Africa.
”

JB, UK

Getting out of full-time employment is easier said than done. I now run my own business in a partnership of two but the responsibility that goes with this is more horrendous than I at first imagined. Sure, charity work is a good option. But in our age of IT with its surfeit of commercial pressures, to live without the prospect of a reasonable income is basically jumping from the fat into the fire.

Simon Cameron, UK

If only!!!!

Dave Hartley, Stourbridge, England

The total tax burden in the UK for full time employees is currently 50% and rising. Perhaps if the government was not so bureaucratic, corrupt and inefficient, and chose to reduce the tax burden, we would not all have to work so hard to survive on our existing incomes.

Ross Bradshaw, UK

Most of the problem is the obsessively commercial culture we live in. The parts of life not occupied with earning money, are occupied with finding ways to spend it-and always coming up short. Ending the vicious circle, you find time and space to explore other things in life that give a greater reward than the 'instant gratification' of consumerism.

Mark, UK

When judging our society we have to look both forward and

backwards. Our technology has a bad name but we use it every day to make our lives easier. Perhaps we forget just how hard things were only a hundred years ago for people. There will always be those who abuse their positions and take what they can get whilst others suffer. Still, like most I work to live.

Paul, UK

Absolutely! After eight years of working a 12 hour day in a highly stressed (and highly paid!) job in London I moved to Dublin five years ago "on spec" I now work at my own pace, get home before the sun sets and have a life! Not everyone has the opportunity in life to break free but for those who are considering it, go for it!

Sarah, Ireland

“Not everyone has the opportunity in life to break free but for those who are considering it, go for it!”

Sarah, Ireland

If our search for happiness, which is fundamentally what we are all looking for, involves radically changing all that we have ever known or are comfortable with, could someone give me a large sum of money so that I feel comfortable with my procrastination....

JP, UK

"Quitting the rat race" is easier said than done for most. Yes those lucky enough to be in a position to do so will contemplate other walks of life! People lucky enough to be financially sound, and still hang around in well paid, high stressed jobs, do as the Dutch lady points out need to take a long look at themselves, and ask what impact that has on their family.

Greg Johnston, Venezuela

After 20 years in IT, I have been made redundant, but with enough money to support myself for a year or so. I plan to pursue my hobby, playing guitar, at college and see if I can make a living doing that. I have always been someone who works to live, not vice versa, so I don't base my self-esteem on job title or car size. But I do think that you should pursue your dreams in life, given the chance...

Adrian, UK

Voluntary work is just an excuse for laziness. Those people who can't handle real life and the sort of human weaklings who "opt-out" like some outdated hippies.

Let the beardy-weirdies go off to the other side of the world, I say, and leave the real jobs, and the women, to those who can cope.

Simon, England

“Voluntary work is just an excuse for laziness.”

Simon, England

Because of the Labour governments ill conceived IR35 legislation. There will be a lot more of us opting out of the rat race next financial year. Why should we pay over 50% tax with no employment rights.

Lance Free, UK

The values of society are wrong, caring and sharing is seen as weak, while greed and money grabbing as strong and desirable.

Dave, England

The vast majority of people work for greedy companies that are more interested in profits for the shareholders and Board instead of actually caring about their staff. Until these companies change their attitudes I can foresee a massive rise in small businesses, charitable work and long term leave due to illnesses such as stress.

It is not people quitting the "rat race" as such, but realising that it is absolutely pointless to kill yourself for some board that really couldn't give a damn about you anyway. Why kill yourself for someone else to make the money?

Mike, England

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”

Mike, England

Much as I'd love to leave the UK and go work overseas as a volunteer, the question that keeps coming back to haunt me is... how do I pay to survive when I'm too old to go on? Materialism is inevitable, in so much as that try as you like to escape it, it's always waiting for you at the end.

Richard, London, UK

The rat race is terrible. You have no chance of survival, because the rats are winning. My advice to all is to return to a simpler life. The 'Cave Man' mentality was more advanced than most of us will ever admit.

We have been enslaved by our technology, efficiency experts, and greed to keep up with people who live in an 'unrealistic world'. A world where female film stars spend \$50,000 for a dress while sex and drugs have replaced good old fashioned family values.

Dave Adams, USA

I don't think this is a fad for the middle classes (evidence please, Tom UK). A lot of people are desperately unhappy in their jobs, and organisations like the VSO offer a chance for you to go abroad for 2-3 years, where you become "somebody" - whether it be teaching English in Eastern Europe or providing business skills in a developing country.

People are not running away from their life to a far away country, like frightened children from school, but instead are renewing their lives and when they return to the UK they are better for the experience.

TJ, England

“The VSO offer a chance for you to go abroad for 2-3 years, where you become "somebody".

”

TJ, England

If you're fed up with the rat race don't try to escape from it - try to change it! Running away (until the money runs out) is never a solution to anything.

Duncan Hurwood, England

I was ingloriously thrown out of the rat-race by a small minded, bullying employer and I haven't looked back since. Now I am a freelance copywriter and I work by my own rules - not someone else's. The freedom is great - try it!

Andrew Wawrowski, UK

What keeps a lot of people in the rat race is their responsibilities to partners, children and banks etc. It also seems to be true that a lot of people who give it up have already made 'enough' money. Ducking out of the Darwinian struggle, however it is manifested, is a luxury!

Andrew, UK

After leaving university, I worked in the City as a management trainee for a blue chip company. I hated it, the office politics, the greed, the stress. I was earning £30,000 a year, but the quality of life is abysmal. I quit and went back to do a PhD. I earn a third of what I used to, but my quality of life is fantastic. A job I enjoy, the chance to fly airplanes.

This morning I've been helping out at an animal sanctuary. To all those thinking about it, there is more to life than earning a packet of dosh. You may earn all that money, but the stress and ill health it may cause getting it will mean you can spend it on your health care!

David, UK

“You may earn all that money, but the stress and ill health it may cause getting it will mean you can spend it on your health care!

”

David, UK

I am inclined to agree with Tom. I'm not at all convinced that many high-earning city slickers will enter voluntary service for the right reasons, instead becoming a burden to all concerned, when "Yah, it's for charity!"

Jonathan, England

I made that personal decision in London year 1978. I am still "professional" but poorly paid. Out of that poor pay I regularly

give about half in different form to even more poorly paid. I do it directly without any intermediate charities. My life is full of experiences because of this.

With many little things you field occasionally like a Field Marshal of the Salvation Army but there is the sad side to it too. So many people are willing to misuse voluntary friendliness and help. When I have to observe that I comfort myself by thinking that these would make good Stock Brokers!

Mikko Toivonen, Finland

Man is an economic animal is the very foundation of exploitative, capitalist, market-based societies. Man does not live by bread alone is oriental philosophy. The inefficiencies and incompetence of the third world, as perceived by the so-called developed world, are often, the result of the compromises made by these societies; to blend the need to make full use of the economic resources with a human, humane touch.

Mohan Singh, India

The answer is simple. If you don't like the life you lead, change it. All you need is the bottle to change it. It is too easy to become engrossed in our daily existence that our perspective on our own life and the future is gone.

My advice is every so often, take a long hard look at what you are doing. Take some time for yourself. If you don't like what you see, change it. If you do, improve it still further. Never stop thinking, adapting and challenging because that is where the excitement is. If you are being deprived of any one of those you need to think why.

Mike Thomas, UK

“
It is too easy to become engrossed in our daily existence that our perspective on our own life and the future is gone.
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Mike Thomas, UK

Well said Tom, 'a fad to the middle classes'. Even though I do think there are some who are genuine and do it for purely altruistic reasons without the need for a boost to their superiority complex.

I used to believe as many people still do, that the people doing such things must be very dedicated and striving for a world without injustice, but unfortunately this is just the image that is projected. When you hear a lot of them talk, you realise that they still have that colonisers outlook. 'going out there to help the natives' bit. If they were really sincere they would have been shouting loud

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When you hear a lot of them talk, you realise that they still have that colonisers outlook "going out there to help the natives" bit.
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KNA, UK

about the injustices meted out at the poor countries of this world by the developed ones.

KNA, UK

I've only just started the rat race, along with 20 others on a city graduate scheme. At least half of us are here just because we feel that we should be doing something like this. I suspect that many of us will face difficult decisions in the future.

Rick, UK

I would be more than happy to give up everything to help the poor or disadvantaged, but who is going to fund the raising of my children? If I had sufficient money and security to be able to cease work, I would devote my time and resources to charitable works.

I suppose there are those who would say material things are not important and I could give up my house and live in a tent, but would this be fair on my children? I know kids today seem to want everything, but to be able to give them nothing would be heartbreaking.

Jenni, UK

I came to work on a crowded tube today to do a job I hate. If I could get out I would. Who would have such a lifestyle for fun? We think we have to overcome the obstacles in our life to finally start living, until we realise the obstacles ARE our life.

Mark, UK

Being aware of changes in the world means that appropriate steps can be taken to ensure its continued existence -which has a direct impact on everyone's existence. And this could be term as a "labour of love". Public Funds should be used for more human ends.

Tajudeen Isiaka, Nigeria

I was in the rat race until last year (working for a multi-national corporation) but it drove me to clinical depression. I quit the race and have now tried to pursue an alternative career, making music. There's no money in it just now, but that's not the point. I found that if it makes you unhappy then you have to help yourself, my advice is quit before it drags you under, as that's what almost happened to me.

Paul Methven, UK

The vast majority are doing this only because they have enough money to do so. There is no altruistic reason, and as soon as things start to go wrong, they'll be back to their comfortable houses and overpaid jobs. It is merely a fad for the middle classes.

Tom, UK

“
It is merely a fad for the middle classes.
”

Tom, UK

The Reggie Perrin syndrome is quite simple. There's a point in

life when some major judgements have to be made. Projecting into the future many people realise that what they are doing with their lives is pointless, despite the material benefits that they may enjoy.

It's necessary to do something for which we have natural talent and enjoy what we do. What is the morality in selling our time for money doing something that is stressful and unrewarding?

Ron Bracey, UK

Many people come to realise they are not really happy with their lives. They dare not ask the most fundamental questions like: Do I really like my job? Do I really love my partner? What would I really like to do?

After submerging themselves in work and relationships for many years, some people come to realise there could be more. But instead of running off to a far away country, they should go to their bathroom and take a long hard look in a mirror. The answers are there, if you dare to ask them.

Jeroen, Netherlands

“After submerging themselves in work and relationships for many years, some people come to realise there could be more.”

Jeroen, Netherlands

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