

## ARE WE STRESSED? BURNT OUT? OR HAVE WE LET WORK BECOME OUR NEW CALLING?

*The following lyrics were remembered by a father who recently lost his son:*

"You work and work for years and years, you're always on the go  
You never take a minute off, too busy makin' dough  
Someday, you say, you'll have your fun, when you're a millionaire  
Imagine all the fun you'll have in your old rockin' chair  
Enjoy yourself, it's later than you think  
Enjoy yourself, while you're still in the pink  
The years go by, as quickly as a wink  
Enjoy yourself, enjoy yourself, it's later than you think"

***This father wrote a letter to the world...*** A few months ago, J.R. Storment wrote a letter that went viral describing the tragic loss of his son. We've included it in this month's newsletter - including his plea "Hug your kids. Don't work too late. A lot of the things you are likely spending your time on you'll regret once you no longer have the time."

***"Workism" has become a global problem*** ... Lyrics like the above, or the famous Cat's in the Cradle song, warn us about the importance of making time for the people we love. Unfortunately, Anna Louie Sussman argues in [The End of Babies](#) that the world may be shifting in the exact opposite direction. She also points to workism - people seeking external validation through work - as the major force behind this problem.

***We've got a webinar that provides answers*** ... Is there a way to counter this trend? YES - and it's good for you and the business that relies on you to do your best at work. Join us next week for our Thursdays with ThirdPath webinar with Peter Senge. [Register here](#) to learn more about how "[The Art and Science of Systems Thinking](#)" can help guide us to better answers.

Thanks for being part of the growing, vibrant, inspiring ThirdPath community!  
/Jessica and the ThirdPath team

***PS - It's not too late to support our nonprofit's cutting edge work and the free resources we make available to all. [Become a donor today.](#)***

## The Art and Science of Systems Thinking

***To understand how we became a world so obsessed with work, you have to understand "systems thinking." It helps identify the multiple forces that brought us to this present moment and provides insight into how to make change.***

Below are a some of the "Laws of Systems Thinking" Peter Senge outlines in his book, *The Fifth Discipline*. We've taken the liberty of applying them to the issue of finding time for both work and family.

### ***Dividing an elephant in half does not produce two small elephants***

It's hard to develop solutions that take the whole system into account, but unless we do, real change is not possible. When it comes to work and family both sides impact the whole. To make change, we can't just focus on changes at work OR home - we can't cut the elephant in half - we must make changes in both arenas.

### ***Cause and effect may not be closely related in time and space***

Systems are very complex, and over time a change in one area may have unintended consequences in another. We can see this from the problem progressive countries faced around gender inequality after implementing long paid parental leaves. Luckily, many of these countries are now addressing this by requiring fathers be the persons who use a certain percent of paid leave time.

### ***Today's problems come from yesterday's "solutions"***

Assumptions around the need to be physically present to get work done are certainly archaic, but it may have been the only way to get work done during the industrial age. Today, the opportunities and challenges of new technologies and a global economy make it much easier to "blend" work and life. However, read on to see how today's solution is creating problems for tomorrow.

### ***The cure can be worse than the disease***

Today, for some people, "blending" has literally become never turning off work. We can see this in Shark Tank super-star [Kevin O'Leary's comments](#), when he said, "I don't have a division anymore between vacation time and work. It's always both. I work every day." And that rule also applies to his employees: "Do I expect my employees to respond to me when they're on vacation? 100%," he says. Is "blending" the only option in today's 24/7 global economy?

### ***Faster is slower***

Perhaps there is a better way ... Instead of prioritizing work over the rest of our lives (and the environment!), we need to develop new mental models that allow all of us to live life at a human pace -- instead of just working harder and faster.

### ***Small changes can produce big results -- but the areas of highest leverage are often the least obvious***

Join us next week when we talk with Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline* - one of the most well-known books written about systems thinking. We promise you will leave with big insights into the "small changes" you can make to find a more satisfying approach to both work and life.

**Want to learn more? [Register to join](#) next week's Thursdays with ThirdPath webinar with Peter Senge.**

## You May Have Seen This Go Viral ...

Back in September you may have seen the letter that [J.R. Storment wrote to the world](#). It captured the deep pain he experienced at the tragic and unexpected loss of his son ... It also seems to be a plea to avoid the tragedies of workism.

"Eight years ago, during the same month, I had twin boys and co-founded Cloudability. About three months ago Cloudability was acquired. About three weeks ago we lost one of our boys.

"When I got the call, I was sitting in a conference room with 12 people at our Portland office talking about PTO policies. Minutes earlier, I had admitted to the group that in the last 8 years I'd not taken more than a contiguous week off...

"Jessica (my wife) had thought Wiley was simply sleeping in. He loved to sleep, he loved his bed, and it had been a big week of late bedtimes and fun daytime activities with visiting friends. Eventually she got the sense it had been too long and went in to check on him. He was cold. The Medical Examiner later estimated he had been dead for at least 8-10 hours by the time she found him, indicating he passed early in the night.

"Last year, Wiley was diagnosed with a typically mild form of epilepsy called Benign Rolandic Epilepsy that is most common in boys between 8-13. It's called 'benign' because it typically resolves on its own by the teenage years.

***"All of the multiple pediatricians and neurologists with whom we discussed his condition said there was little to be concerned about. He had the "best" type of epilepsy and we should let it run its course.***

"None mentioned SUDEP, which is ultimately what killed him. SUDEP is shorthand for Sudden Unexplained Death of Epilepsy. It's rare enough that there is a philosophical debate in the neurology community about whether to proactively tell parents about it...

***After this tragedy, "many have asked what they can do to help. Hug your kids. Don't work too late. A lot of the things you are likely spending your time on you'll regret once you no longer have the time. I'm guessing you have 1:1 meetings with a lot of people you work with. Do you have them regularly scheduled with your kids? If there's any lesson to take away from this, it's to remind others (and myself) not to miss out on the things that matter ...***

"I've learned to stop waiting to do the things the kids ask for. When we sold the business, I gave each of the boys a \$100 bill. They decided to pool their money to buy a tent for camping. But we didn't make it happen before Wiley died. Another regret. So, after the first round of family visits after his death, I took Jessica and Oliver to camp near Mt. St. Helens.

"Somehow, we got to the wilderness without enough cash to cover the campground fee and had a slight panic. Jessica then realized that Wiley's \$100 bill was still in his seat pocket. He got to spend his money on camping after all. ***Collectively, the family said a big, "Thanks, buddy" out loud to him. It was one of many bittersweet moments we will experience for the rest of our lives.***"