

Work smarter not harder

(LEVEL B2/C1)

Part 1: WARM-UP

EX.1. Look at the title of this lesson. Do you agree with this thought? What are your ideas to work smarter? Think of the following points:

- prioritizing tasks
- unnecessary/long meetings
- distractions
- home office

Part 2: LISTENING

Source: <https://podcastsinenglish.com/pages1/levelbusiness.shtml>

EX.2. Listen to the podcast about a certain trial recently conducted in one of the companies in New Zealand and answer the following questions. Then compare with a partner.

1. What did the trial concern?
2. Was it successful? Why?/Why not?
3. How is the new working system different to the one in the U.S.?
4. Do the speakers mention any disadvantages?
5. What kind of solution has been implemented in France?
6. Would you like to see any of the abovementioned working systems introduced in your company? Why?//Why not?

Part 3: READING

EX.3.a. Read more about the idea of a 4-day working week below. What extra information can you find in the article?

EX. 3.b. Now take a look at the eight highlighted expressions. With your partner try to guess their meaning from the context.

[...]

The firm, Perpetual Guardian, which manages trusts, wills and estates, found the change actually **boosted productivity** among its 240 employees, who said they spent more time with their families, exercising, cooking, and working in their gardens.

The firm **ran the experiment** — which reduced the workweek to 32 hours from 40 — in March and April this year, and asked two researchers to study the effects on staff.

Jarrood Haar, a human resources professor at Auckland University of Technology, said employees reported a 24 percent improvement in work-life balance, and came back to work energized after their days off.

“Supervisors said staff were more creative, their attendance was better, they were on time, and they didn’t leave early or take long breaks,” Mr. Haar said. “Their actual job performance didn’t change when doing it over four days instead of five.”

Similar experiments in other countries have tested the concept of reducing work hours as a way of improving individual productivity. In Sweden, a trial in the city of Gothenburg **mandated a six-hour day**, and officials found employees completed the same amount of work or even more. But when France mandated a 35-hour workweek in 2000, businesses complained of reduced competitiveness and increased hiring costs.

In Perpetual Guardian’s case, workers said the change motivated them to find ways of increasing their productivity while in the office. Meetings were reduced from two hours to 30 minutes, and employees created signals for their colleagues that they needed time to **work without distraction**.

“They worked out where they were wasting time and worked smarter, not harder,” Mr. Haar said.

Andrew Barnes, the company's founder, said he believed his was the first business in the world to pay staff for 40 hours when working 32; other firms have allowed employees to work shorter weeks by **compressing** the standard 40 hours **into** fewer days, or allowed people to work part-time for a reduced salary.

Mr. Barnes said he came up with the idea for a four-day workweek after reading a report that suggested people spent less than three hours of their work day productively employed, and another that said distractions at work could **have effects** on staff **akin to** losing a night's sleep or smoking marijuana.

He said the results of Perpetual Guardian's trial showed that when hiring staff, supervisors should negotiate tasks to be performed, rather than basing contracts on hours new employees spent in the office. "Otherwise you're saying, 'I'm too lazy to figure out what I want from you, so I'm just going to pay you for showing up,'" Mr. Barnes said. "A contract should be about an agreed level of productivity," he added. "If you deliver that in less time, why should I cut your pay?" He said working mothers **stood to benefit** most from the policy, since those returning to work from maternity leave often negotiated part-time hours, but performed **the equivalent of** full-time work. "You've got 20 percent of cars off the road in rush hour; there are implications for urban design, such as smaller offices," he said.

Perpetual Guardian's board will now consider making the change permanent.

A 4-day Workweek? A Test Run Shows a Surprising Result by Charlotte Graham Mc-Lay ; Published July 19 2018 by The New York Times
Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/19/world/asia/four-day-workweek-new-zealand.html>

Part 4: VOCABULARY PRACTICE + SPEAKING

EX.4. Discuss the following questions with your partner. Make sure you use the new vocabulary as often as possible.

1. What do you usually do to **boost your productivity** at work?
2. Do you think your company would **run this experiment**? Why/why not?
3. How would you benefit from **mandating** a 6-hour day in your company?

4. If you are given a task to do, are you able *to work without any distraction*?
5. Would you be able to *compress* your typical workload *into* 32 hours instead of 40?
6. Have you ever experienced any effects of distraction at work *akin to* losing a night's sleep?
7. Who else apart from working mothers could *stand to benefit* from the 4-day working week?
8. Have you ever worked part-time but performed *the equivalent of* a full-time contract?

LISTENING: KEY

EX.2. Listen to the podcast about a certain trial recently conducted in one of the companies in New Zealand and answer the following questions. Then compare with a partner.

1. What did the trial concern? *The introduction of a 4-day working week in a certain insurance company in New Zealand*
2. Was it successful? Why?/Why not? *Yes. The results showed lower stress levels, higher levels of job satisfaction and improved sense of work-life balance; productivity increased*
3. How is the new working system different to the one in the U.S.? *Employees work 32 hours over 4 days instead of 40 hours like in the U.S.*
4. Do the speakers mention any disadvantages? *Employees may be less productive on the 4th day, pressure to come to meetings on the 5th day*
5. What kind of solution has been implemented in France? *Companies have made regulations which stopped employees responding to phone calls and emails after certain time*