

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

THE GOODWORK PROJECT

America is a country consumed with and by work. Workaholics are praised and rewarded; the number of hours logged at the office serves as grounds for bragging rights as friends, colleagues, even strangers engage in an unstated competition for the social title and status of “most diligent worker.” While some complain about hours, few intentionally cut back and many others actually prefer going to work to remaining at home. As Americans are clocking more and more time at the office and correspondingly less time in other pursuits, it is natural to assume that more work is being done. But is this work of greater value than that of days past? Do hardworking Americans care about the caliber and worth of their work, or is it enough to just do more of it?

The GoodWork Project, an inter-university research endeavor, is investigating these issues. Its aim is to find and understand GoodWork and its practitioners, to share this information with others, and to promote further GoodWork. The life’s work of Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa exemplify what is meant by GoodWork—work that is both high quality and socially responsible.

This drive to identify, understand, and educate is spearheaded by leading psychologists Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon. In 1995, they and their research teams at Harvard, the University of Chicago, Claremont Graduate University, and Stanford began a search into the lives of American professionals who seek to combine excellence and ethics. Since then, the researchers have conducted over 700 in-depth interviews with leaders from a number of fields—including genetics, journalism, higher education, medicine, theatre, criminal law, cyberlaw, philanthropy, and business—probing these professionals with questions about their values, goals, responsibilities, strategies and struggles.

The Project is also looking at a number of related topics: (1) the development of GoodWork from childhood through adolescence and into young adulthood; (2) how spirituality and meditation affect GoodWork and its practitioners; (3) how GoodWork is transmitted from one generation to the next. Parallel investigations are underway in Scandinavia and Latvia, led by Danish colleague Hans Henrik Knoop.

The Project’s recent publication, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* (Basic Books 2001), focuses on the lives of expert journalists and geneticists—examining how these individuals conduct themselves and their work in the face of powerful market pressures and perpetual technological advancements. Each set of veteran workers—one concerned with the information in our bodies, the other concerned with the information in our minds—offers a unique view on the requirements for and challenges to performing GoodWork in a particular profession. Geneticists, eager and encouraged to pursue their scientific inquiries with integrity, face the future with optimism. Meanwhile, journalists are experiencing a period of discontent and impaired ability to live up to the time-honored ideals of their profession.

People often wonder what to do with this information—if I am neither a journalist nor a geneticist, what can I learn from them about performing GoodWork of my own? The “mirror test” is a classic starting point for any such inquiry. As a worker, can you look into a mirror and face your reflection with pride, or do you meet your own eyes in an uncertain gaze? What concerns do you have about the decisions you made yesterday and what can you do differently today? After the events of September 11th 2001, countless people found themselves reassessing their purpose in life and the worth of their vocational pursuits. Some individuals have begun to seek professional outlets that are more personally meaningful. Others have stayed in the same jobs, while striving to bring higher standards of quality and social responsibility to their work. Issues of GoodWork are intensely relevant to many of us at this time.

Awareness of the concept of GoodWork is a first step in understanding how you can become better engaged at meeting the professional and personal goals that you have set out for yourself, all while making a meaningful contribution to society. When you understand how others try to steer this course, as detailed by journalists and geneticists in *Good Work*, you provide yourself with a framework for beginning to feel good (or better) about what you do. And when your week includes 40, 60, even 80 hours of investment in professional pursuits, who wouldn't want to make that time more fulfilling?

Members of the GoodWork research teams share their findings with the public. By giving lectures, working on training program curricula, and publishing articles in popular print media, they hope to increase awareness and public dialogue about these timely matters of concern. In the past year, Principal Investigators Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon have presented this work at many venues, such as the 92nd Street Y in New York, and keynoting several international conferences on GoodWork in Copenhagen (January 2002).

Other educational outlets exist as well. The Project's website, www.goodworkproject.org, is a great resource for anyone interested in learning more about this groundbreaking study. Here you can access reports on the myriad dimensions of GoodWork, as well as Principal Investigator bios and funder information. Journalists can benefit from the Project's work by participating in the travelling journalism curriculum developed by William Damon, while educators from around the world are invited to take a short course on GoodWork at Project Zero's annual Summer Institute. Numerous papers are posted on the Project website, one volume on GoodWork in youth has been published, and several other volumes are in preparation.

One's understanding of, and appreciation for, GoodWork is important at any stage of any career. So, why should you want to do GoodWork? How will you know if you're doing it? How can you learn to be a better worker? It is up to each of us to take pause and reflect on the GoodWork Project's notions of excellence and social responsibility and how they apply to our own efforts in the working world. Only then can we hope to do best for our selves and society. You're already putting in the hours, America. Make sure they count.

Prepared 4/30/02