

About Part-Time Work

by Anne Emerson

This will not be a structured essay, like some. I am preparing to go on vacation and I only have a short time to write this, as I find it necessary to look after my own life. My family is hurting; many of them seem to think the problem lies with me, and they are trying to coerce me into “treatment.” although I did the best I could, I feel that the forces against me have been overwhelming. Please see “It’s a Crazy World,” on the Happiness page of my website, Anniespicsandpoems.com

About part-time work. I am referring to work here in the USA, specifically to my personal experience with part-time jobs in the Commonwealth of Virginia –

- A parent with children wants to work during the hours in which their children are at school. Employers know this and are happy to create jobs like this, BUT...
- Part-time jobs typically have no benefits (no health insurance, no sick leave, no vacation or holiday pay), low wages, and the employer will “ding” the parent if he or she calls in “absent” because a child is ill/sick. Wages can be below any legal minimum wage, if the employee is assumed to work for tips. Some jobs are said to be “for tips,” when in fact the customers do not tip the workers.
- Many part-time jobs are boring; conditions are unsafe (because the employer is trying to save money and many of the workers don’t know about OSHA or are afraid to speak out, if they do); behavior can be obnoxious (people don’t want middle management jobs and take it out on the workers); favoritism is rampant; anti-elitism (er, anti-good-work-ism) exacerbates the situation.
- If the school is poor, parents who can afford to stay home will do so, and will “home-school” the children. These children don’t know how to relate to “ordinary” children, and may think it’s the other children’s fault.
- Parents who can afford to do so may pay for private schooling. THESE children don’t know how to relate to ordinary children and may think it’s the other children’s fault.
- Parents who can get professional jobs and careers may think that earning money is more important than being present in their children’s lives. I ran a family daycare business myself for a while, and took children’s portraits, while I was working on my own graduate education. I can assure you that psychological issues can start VERY young. I will not expand upon that because I am not formally trained as a psychologist and should not presume to offer a formal diagnosis of some of the children in my care. But, if you spend time with someone, you can see how they behave.
- I hope we are not entering an era in which most people think that self-absorbed behavior is the normal human condition. It most certainly is not. Human beings are capable of tremendous self-sacrifice. It would be nice if society did not expect this of ONLY the most destitute among us!

Possible resolutions to the unfairness (inequity) of part-time vs. full-time work:

- Offer part-time workers decent pay and benefits
- Take away decent pay and benefits from full-time workers. Come up with a different way of organizing things like health care and vacations
- Reduce the work week or expand school hours (including school vacations) so that everyone works the hours that accommodate children's schooling
- Job-sharing, so that two people can share a full-time job and one works while the other (or the school) cares for the children. This could work for a married couple
- For people who are not married and/or do not have children, let them do volunteer work or education and training during the hours in which they are "idle" (because they *may only* do paid work during the hours when other people's children are in school). This will reduce the incentive for workaholism
- Keep organizations small, so that employers have more personal contact with employees and inequity doesn't grow to the levels it appears to have reached these days
- Keep societies ("civil society") strong, so that abuses are not allowed to accumulate and get covered up or denied. "It takes a village..."

All I am doing here is showing readers how it is done, to brainstorm solutions. I am sure you can think of many of your own. A few things to keep in mind, before acting hastily, are these:

- The education system will affect how children learn, and what they grow up thinking and believing. So, we need to train teachers as well as educate children and parents
- Lack of diversity in education (both methods and content) can lead to a whole culture that is mal-adapted as conditions change
- What we teach, at all levels, affects what our adult population will be able to do as they grow and develop in their adult lives
- Most people think we need to match the skills of our beginning workforce with the new jobs opening up. This is pretty difficult. We might want to come up with a different way of preparing people for their futures. That, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of the present essay. But someone has to think about it. In my opinion.