

As the daily juggle moves into '08, what's hot, what's not

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The word of the year is overload. Will 2008 bring a cure?

Work hours for many keep creeping up - and vacations are going the way of the rotary telephone. We live in a time of communications on steroids - and the off-button doesn't limit the onslaught. It's a noisy, hyper, workaholic era, and yet I see a few gratifying signs that we're tiring of overload, speed, and limitless living.

These embryonic changes surfaced in 2007, and I predict they will gain strength in the coming year and hold the potential to remap our careers, home lives, and even our mind-sets. Here's a peek at the trends to watch, beginning with the state of careers after the walls came tumbling down - the walls of work, that is.

Fluidity is in. Piecemeal flexing is out. How can flexible work arrangements be so popular yet so passé? Listen to Cathleen Benko, vice chairman and chief talent officer at Deloitte & Touche, and you'll begin to understand. She helped invent a companywide approach to career management that is creating a stir across corporate America. After noticing that employee satisfaction was declining slightly despite 69 different flexible work programs, Benko and other executives took a radical step.

In brief, they realized that workplaces still operate largely on Industrial Age models of uninterrupted, male careers and mom-based care giving. These days, Generation Y wants time off to volunteer and dual-earner parents struggle to do it all, and yet "flexible work" -now available to 65 percent of employees nationwide - is largely treated as an exception to the norm, granted if you have a willing manager.

Instead, Deloitte's "Mass Career Customization" program, despite its rather clunky name, assumes that flexibility is the new norm. Deloitte now talks of a "career lattice," not a ladder, with many paths leading to different kinds of success. Scale back to care for an elderly parent, for instance, then return to the fast track. By the end of next year, all 40,000 US-based Deloitte employees will be able to customize their careers by periodically adjusting their work pace, job setting and schedule, workload, and company role under the program.

If the program succeeds, workers and employers gain a framework for holistically managing fluid 21st-century careers, plus a new means of tackling overload. "Policies

alone are not enough," says Ellen Kossek, a Michigan State University professor who studies alternative work and is the coauthor of a new book, "Ceo of Me," on "flex-styles," from integration to "volleying" back and forth between home and work.

Career fluidity is coming. Parents land good jobs after years out of work, bosses care less about where you toil, and career customization and a new lexicon of flex-styles can inject some needed consistency and individuality into the messy arena of today's work. What we need next, as we chart our course, is to better see the road ahead. [Continued...](#)

De-cluttering is in. Multitasking is out. Sarah Buckwalter organizes homes and offices for a living. What does her Boston business have to do with our daily juggle? Clearly, finding your birth certificate or car keys quickly is a plus, but more important, she and other professionals see, as I do, a rising desire for simplicity - in possessions and in life.

"I think people are still frenzied," says Buckwalter, owner of Organizing Boston. "But people are aware of the fact that they don't have to be so frenzied, that they can have a choice."

Says Mary Carlomagno, owner of the Hoboken, N.J.-based organizing business, Order: "The organizing trend is all about taking stock. It's taking stock of your life, of your relationships, of your time."

Watch for the word "de-clutter" in 2008. People are increasingly tired of hyper-connectivity, information overload, excessive work hours. As I noted in past columns, companies are trying to boost face time and creative "white space" to offset the diffusion and fragmentation of virtual, hyper-interrupted work days. Workers are rethinking gadget addiction, and asking whether constantly chopping up and switching tasks is all that efficient.

"Americans value efficiency, achievement, success, busy-ness, and it makes our society very rich but deprives us of an internal sense of peace and contentment," says Margaret Hothem, a professor of recreation and leisure at Gordon College in Wenham. She has been trying to slow down by "monotasking" more.

Yet can a society that devalues rest learn to de-clutter? More than half of Americans say they don't use up their vacation time, reports staffing firm Hudson. When we do take brief breaks, we tote work along. We need to see the benefit of sometimes slowing down in daily life, and over our long careers.

At a recent end-of-year staff meeting at the Families and Work Institute in New York, anyone who'd used up their vacation days got to put on a humorous light-up crown. Only two people couldn't be anointed, including president Ellen Galinsky. She had to work through one scheduled break this year to tackle a work crisis, although she usually takes her vacation time. "There's this image of a career as a marathon that you cannot stop running until you keel over," says Galinsky. "But the people who train for marathons do take time to rest and recover."

She spoke the day before leaving for a nearly two-week family vacation to the Caribbean - without her laptop.

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