

Hustle culture is destroying our clients. It's time they let their impossible standards crash to the ground

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. 'Hustle culture' is an idea about life and work. It makes people focus on hard work, long hours and success. It tells people that their work is more important than their health and personal lives. Look at the list below. Order them from 1 (most important to you) to 7 (least important).

- making lots of money _____
- spending time with family and friends _____
- feeling healthy and positive _____
- being successful or important at work _____
- enjoying weekends and holidays _____
- staying busy all day _____
- having free time alone _____

2 Key words

a. Choose the correct word to match each definition. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context. Some words may appear in a different form in the article.

hustle

exhausted

ignore

flexible

pace

1. open to making change and trying different things _____
2. to move with lots energy and effort to meet a goal _____
3. extremely tired or sleepy _____
4. to refuse to pay attention to something or someone _____
5. how quickly or slowly something moves _____

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recovery

productivity

struggle

purpose

reward

6. to get money or other positive things when you work hard _____
7. the act of producing things quickly and effectively _____
8. to fight against something difficult or upsetting _____
9. when someone gets better and healthier _____
10. the reason or use for something _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. Some students _____ to finish their university degrees.
2. Machines increase _____ because they are faster than people.
3. My boss is going to _____ me for the good work I did this year.
4. The _____ of work at the restaurant was too fast for me.
5. After a long day work, Sara felt _____.
6. What is the _____ of this meeting?
7. Businesspeople work hard and _____ to sell more products.
8. Please answer the phone. Don't _____ it!
9. My timetable isn't _____. I can't change it.
10. Alan was hurt in a car accident, but now he is in _____.

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The modern mind is a column where experts discuss mental health issues they are seeing in their work

Gaynor Parkin and Dave Winsborough
15 March, 2026

- 1 From the outside, Ariana* is brilliant at her job. Her days move quickly. When her baby sleeps, she makes calls and replies to messages. When the baby wakes, everything begins again. She's exhausted but she keeps working at a pace.
- 2 This way of living is called "the cult of productivity". It comes from "hustle culture" – do more and do it faster!
- 3 In our work, we often see people struggle. But it's not because they are bad at productivity. It's because they are too good at it.
- 4 Phil* looked for help after a health scare. He had too many meetings, a huge team to manage, and lots of responsibilities. Phil was exhausted, but he struggled to look after his health.
- 5 Murray* told us he had panic attacks at work. "I know I'm in that sandwich generation – working, looking after kids and an elderly parent – but I don't think I can do it all".
- 6 We notice when a colleague works too hard or a friend is always busy. We offer good advice: slow down, take a break, rest, be kinder to yourself. But often, we don't recognise these problems in our own lives.

- 7 Many people believe that productivity equals worth. Hard work and a fast pace are rewarded in business. Hustle culture ignores exhaustion or makes it look exciting.
- 8 We need to change our beliefs about productivity. Instead of following black-and-white rules ("more is better"), we can have more flexible beliefs ("recovery is important", "a slower pace can be useful, not lazy").
- 9 We also have to think about the purpose of rest. If we only rest to be more productive, then we don't truly rest at all.
- 10 Finally, we need to make small changes. Ariana asked: "What happens if I stop 10 minutes earlier? Take a lunch break?" Murray finished work an hour earlier on some days. This gave him a break before his family responsibilities. Phil gave work to other people on his team so he could focus on recovery.
- 11 We recommend Oliver Burkeman's book *Four Thousand Weeks*. He explains that there will always be more things to do than what is possible in a lifetime.
- 12 Sometimes, instead of doing, we need to simply learn how to be. Our clients' lesson is simple but not easy: we don't need to finish the list before we make time for play and recovery (the list will never be finished, and that's OK).

* The people named in the article are based on a mix of real clients.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 15/3/2026

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3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True or False.

1. Hustle culture means more work, more stress and less relaxation.
2. The 'sandwich generation' look after both their children and their parents.
3. It's easy for people to recognise when they are working too hard or too much.
4. In hustle culture, people worry about exhaustion. They think it's dangerous.
5. The authors say rest and breaks are a good way to be more productive.
6. The only way to get better is to make lots of big life changes.
7. We can't always complete everything on our 'to do' list. That's okay.

4 Key language

a. Look at the list of words below. Find the comparative forms in the article.

	Comparative form
early	1. _____
fast	2. _____
flexible	3. _____
good	4. _____
kind	5. _____
productive	6. _____
slow	7. _____

b. Look at the comparative forms in the table. Complete the grammar rules.

1. To make comparatives with short words, add _____.
2. To make comparatives with long words, add _____.
3. When the word ends in -y, change the -y to _____ and add -er.
4. Some words, like _____, have irregular comparative forms.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Do you experience hustle culture in your life? How?
2. Do you think the advice in the article is helpful? Why?

6 In your own words

a. Tell a friend or family member about hustle culture. Help them understand what it is and how it affects people. Write a chat app message with text and images. Include this information:

- A definition of hustle culture in your own words
- Three examples of hustle culture behaviour
- Two reasons why hustle culture is dangerous
- Two pieces of advice to help people with hustle culture
- One more interesting fact about hustle culture

b. Share your message with your class. Did you learn anything new from your classmates' messages?