

## From First to Worst

We can clearly see the sources of discontent that drive the 4th American Revolution when we take a closer look at America today. We all like to imagine America as the pinnacle of the good life, but Americans are not even in the top tier of world citizens when it comes to personal happiness. We now know this through global research studies performed by economists and psychologists<sup>8</sup>. Americans are overworked, overstressed, and overstuffed. The average American man works 51 hours a week. The average working woman, 43 hours a week. And 17% of us work more than 60

<sup>8</sup> Wagner, Cynthia G. (2006, Nov.-Dec.). The well-being of nations. The Futurist, 12. (The US ranked 23rd)

hours per week! On average, Americans work 7 weeks more each year than workers in most of the developed nations<sup>9</sup>. We even work more than Japan. And that doesn't include commuting time. For many Americans, the ride to work costs another 8 to 10 hours a week, or more. Another 60 days a year. Who takes real vacations anymore? We swallow anti-depressants by the truckload so we can slog through another work-year. This is the good life?

It's not just the quantity of work that is killing us. It's the whole way we look at life. Happiness research performed in over 46 countries combined with data from the World Values Survey indicates that our current version of the pursuit of happiness is out of gas.

We've created a society that consumes 40% more than any other citizens of developed nations. But by every other measure: debt, health, education, family, marriage, leisure and happiness...we are trailing. In 30 years among first world countries we've nearly gone from first to worst. On average we have the most debt, worst health care, poorest education, most criminals, highest divorce rate, lowest leisure time, and least happiness.<sup>10</sup> I know this is hard to believe. It was for me too. Thirty years ago we led the world in almost everything that mattered. Today, of the 19 most developed nations, we languish in nearly every category. For instance, according to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation research we trail Poland in education. We trail Iceland and Ireland and seven other countries in both adult literacy and life expectancy. And only tiny Aruba has a higher divorce rate. It's sad.

Increasingly our society seems to have no unifying "North Star." Our compass needle spins in a crazy free-for-all of frantic ambition, consumerism, and self-inflation. If we are to believe the media, self-indulgence now seems to be the way to self-realization and credit card debt the route to the American Dream.

Is this it? Is this the best we can do? Hell, no.

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9 Kay, John. (2004). Culture and prosperity. New York: HarperCollins.

10 The Economist. World in figures. (2006). London: Profile Books.