

RYDER MAWBY  
STAFF

## Professional purgatory

There is a 10th circle of hell and Americans live in it — corporatism.

The alarm rings. It's 6:30 a.m. on Monday morning. I hop out of bed, take a shower and grab my breakfast. Heading to school, I see hundreds of others in the same shoes, dreading the monotonous work and fatigue that's to come.

I always dreaded that morning drive to school. Passing fields upon fields of crops and livestock as I leave my refuge nestled in the center of the Appalachian Mountains, I sigh at the thought of yet another day — along with everyone else in my house. We embark on our separate work endeavors. Another day of boredom, another uneventful day of routine.

The eight-hour workday of American work culture has never made sense to me. Our heavy dependence on bursts of fake, life-giving stimulus such as coffee or social media is the only way to endure such a strained lifestyle. Our culture has normalized this detrimental monotony. This social construct has devised a society that values growth of its gross domestic product over the well-being of its people — but at what cost?

Not only is corporate work depreciating Americans' happiness, it's concentrating exorbitant amounts of wealth into the hands of the [few](#). The archetypal American work ethic has single-handedly carried the United States to the top of the international business ladder, but straight to the bottom of the happiest industrialized nations ranking.

Working nonstop incites actual physical, mental and emotional symptoms. We absorb such an unhealthy amount of negative energy from workaholism and peer pressure that it actually begins to manifest itself within us — call it the virus of American capitalism.

Our economy depends on individual trust in its markets to operate, and for the most part it receives this trust. We're led to believe that the eight-hour workday is for our own benefit because no other mainstream options are presented to us. The false illusion of stability and upward advancement that comes along with the 9-to-5 lifestyle entices many into the corporate lifestyle.

In reality, entertaining capitalism heeds many short-term rewards, but few long-term ones. The American Dream is dangled over us by corporate America to distract from the truth: There is no [ethical way](#) to make a billion dollars. This is precisely why our economic system isn't going to be receiving any trust from me.

My grandmother wants me to work on Wall Street. I don't blame her. Nowadays, serving as a cog in corporate America's machine is the easiest route you can take to a comfortable living. We see increasing wealth as a catalyst to increasing happiness. But what's often ignored is the existence of a [threshold of wealth](#) that once passed, no longer rewards any extra benefit. This threshold is much lower than we like to acknowledge, and from that point on there's no use trying to buy joy.

My family sees a career in finance as something that will keep me content with life because it'll bring financial comfort. But I want more than comfort; I want happiness. I want to look back on my life and feel like I contributed something of substance to this withering world, and I have a heck of a rough time seeing that happen while working 40 hours a week. At a certain point, we need to prioritize quality of life over the advancement of a country that only acts for the status quo.

I sometimes wonder why I'm throwing away my golden years under the false pretense of future prosperity. I spent the entirety of my freshman year at UC Berkeley exploring personal interests, only to be told by friends and family that my passions are useless for career purposes. I know many of my peers are in the same position.

This leaves me with two choices: I can submit to the allure of a financially rich but substantively dull life, or I can say “f— it” and play Russian roulette by pursuing my passions. Either way, I could end up hurt.

This dilemma complicates itself further when you consider the structural barriers to your professional path. Will coming from a lower middle-class family affect my ability to adjust to a corporate lifestyle? Will I be taken seriously in a professional setting with my noticeably “gay” voice? Will I ever make it out of this capitalist nightmare or will I remain in corporate purgatory for the entirety of my life?

I do know one thing for sure, our situations aren't looking up right now. We scrape by each day — collecting coins for next month's rent, coexisting alongside an invisible virus that could kill us at any moment and maintaining strained relationships, all while sleeping under [marigold skies](#), an angelic description for something not quite so holy. Life is hard, but what are we to do other than persist?

There are so many different paths towards happiness. I've struggled with chasing my passions my entire life — but from this point on I'm making a commitment to pursue a sense of belonging.

I'm choosing fulfillment, not fortune.

*Ryder Mawby writes the Monday column on his transition from the East to West Coast. Contact him at [opinion@dailycal.org](mailto:opinion@dailycal.org). LAST UPDATED: OCTOBER 18, 2020*