# The Four-Day Workweek

The long weekend that isn't quite so simple

**SPEAK FIRST | Talk in pairs. There are no right or wrong opinions.**

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1. Would an extra day off change your life—or would you end up doing other people's jobs?
2. When has something that looked too good to be true turned out to have a catch?
3. What is one change your workplace or school could make without spending more?

## 1 WORD POWER

Match the six useful expressions to their meanings. Then use two of them in your own sentences.

1. too good to be true _____
2. come with a catch _____
3. work flat out _____
4. cut back on _____
5. carry on _____
6. around the clock _____

A. reduce the amount or frequency of something

B. continue doing something

C. all day and all night

D. so attractive that there may be an unexpected problem

E. include a hidden condition or disadvantage

F. work extremely hard without much rest

## 2 READ THE STORY

**The long weekend that isn't quite so simple**

Imagine that, starting next month, you could leave work on Thursday and still receive the same salary. It sounds too good to be true. Perhaps you would finally visit a friend, take a course or simply have a slow Friday morning. But then your manager announces that every deadline will stay the same. Suddenly, a three-day weekend comes with a catch: you may have to work flat out from Monday to Thursday.

That worry explains why a genuine shorter working week is different from squeezing five long days into four. In the best-designed experiments, teams find ways to cut back on unnecessary meetings, organise their work better and avoid being constantly interrupted. The aim is to reduce hours without cutting pay or quietly piling more pressure onto workers.

In 2022, 61 UK organisations, employing about 2,900 people, tried shorter hours for six months. Fifty-six said afterwards that they wanted to carry on. Surveyed workers reported less stress and

burnout. A later peer-reviewed international study published in 2025 followed almost 2,900 workers at 141 organisations and also reported improvements in well-being. These are encouraging results, although the employers had chosen to take part and might not represent every workplace.

The idea also raises an awkward question: who gets an extra day off, and who keeps everything running? An office might be able to replace three weekly meetings with one clear message. A café still needs someone to make lunch. Hospitals must care for patients around the clock. Those staff deserve rest too, but their employers may have to stagger days off, hire more people or offer different forms of flexibility.

Even among people who have a free Friday, the day may not feel free. One person goes hiking; another catches up on childcare, housework or caring for an older relative. An extra day can be a real lifeline, but it can also disappear into unpaid responsibilities. A fairer arrangement may depend on giving employees some say rather than assuming the same timetable suits everyone.

Small businesses face a particular dilemma. A large employer may be able to cover shifts across several teams, whereas a local shop with three staff could be stretched thin. Its owner might support the principle yet fear letting customers down or increasing prices. Dismissing that worry as an excuse would be unfair. So would demanding that employees keep working long hours simply because change is inconvenient.

There's another lesson from a different experiment. The technology company Buffer once found that an unlimited-holiday policy did not mean everyone took enough leave. People sometimes hesitate to take time off when colleagues look busy or the unspoken expectation is always to be available. On paper, a generous policy can look brilliant; in practice, workplace culture makes all the difference.

If your workplace were considering a trial, what would tip the balance? You might ask for a clear promise about pay, a plan to keep services running, and an honest way to check whether people are exhausted by Thursday. Employers should be willing to listen if things go wrong. Workers should be able to admit that a popular experiment has problems without being accused of letting the team down.

Perhaps the strongest case for trying a four-day week is not that it will transform every business overnight. It is that many working habits are worth questioning. A sensible trial gives people room to make mistakes, hear objections and go back to the drawing board. The prize isn't simply another Friday off. It is a working life in which time, fairness and good work can coexist.

## 3 DID YOU CATCH THAT?

Answer in your own words. Then compare with a partner and find evidence in the text.

1. Why might a four-day week fail to feel restful?

2. What do the 2022 and 2025 studies suggest?

3. Why might an extra day off not be equally free for everyone?

4. What lesson does the Buffer holiday example illustrate?

## 4 LET'S TALK

Choose the questions that interest your group. Give reasons, ask follow-up questions and respond to different opinions.

1. What would you do with extra free time that you cannot easily do now?

2. When has a change that sounded too good to be true turned out to have a catch?

3. Would you welcome a four-day week if it meant four exhausting days?
4. Is it more important to work fewer days or feel more in control of your time?
5. Which tasks at work could be cut back without anyone missing them?
6. When do meetings and messages get in the way of doing your job?
7. Can a benefit be unfair if only office workers can realistically enjoy it?
8. What might be a workable compromise for a hospital or small shop?
9. Would you trust a business to keep pay the same after a trial? What would reassure you?
10. Have you ever felt guilty about taking a day off? Why might that happen?
11. Could an extra day off simply fill up with unpaid responsibilities?
12. How would you challenge the claim that shorter weeks always make people more productive?

## KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Try one or two of these expressions when you respond.

- There's something to be said for ..., although ...
- The proposal sounds ideal, but it comes with a catch ...
- One group we may be overlooking is ...
- It would make all the difference if ...

## 5 MAKE A CHOICE

A local employer wants every staff member to work four shorter days, while remaining available to customers Monday to Friday. Someone must cover Fridays; one employee also has caring duties. Agree on a one-month plan, then respond to a new complaint about long queues.

## ONE LAST THING

What is one opinion you heard today that made you think? Can you explain it fairly, even if you disagree?

## YOUR WEEKLY ROTA | NEGOTIATE A FAIR PLAN

In groups, show when each person or service is available. Keep customers, learners or patients covered. Then let someone object: which day or shift would you change, and why?

| Team / service | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Person or team A | | | | | |
| Person or team B | | | | | |
| Person or team C | | | | | |
| Open / covered? | | | | | |

Our strongest reason: _____ A fair objection: _____

# ANSWERS & EXAMPLES

OPTIONAL FINAL PAGE | Leave this page out when printing for class. Use it to check any exercises you finish later.

## WORD POWER · ANSWER KEY

1. too good to be true — D. so attractive that there may be an unexpected problem
2. come with a catch — E. include a hidden condition or disadvantage
3. work flat out — F. work extremely hard without much rest
4. cut back on — A. reduce the amount or frequency of something
5. carry on — B. continue doing something
6. around the clock — C. all day and all night

## DID YOU CATCH THAT? · SUGGESTED ANSWERS

These are examples. Your answer can use different words if it matches the reading.

**1. Why might a four-day week fail to feel restful?**

Employees may have to finish the same workload in less time.. Compressing the unchanged workload could create stressful days.

**2. What do the 2022 and 2025 studies suggest?**

There were encouraging improvements in some participating workplaces.. The trials report positive outcomes but are not a guarantee for all workplaces.

**3. Why might an extra day off not be equally free for everyone?**

Some people use it for unpaid family and caring work.. Care duties and other responsibilities are distributed unevenly.

**4. What lesson does the Buffer holiday example illustrate?**

A generous rule may not change behaviour without supportive workplace culture.. People can feel discouraged from taking permitted leave.

## EXAMPLE SPEAKING RESPONSES

Discussion questions don't have a single correct opinion. Here are two ways to approach the topic and respond to another view.

I'd welcome a shorter week if the work did not just get squeezed into four exhausting days. More free time could make a real difference to family life.

Then again, some people would rather earn more money, and jobs such as nursing or retail might need different arrangements.

Try: state your view → give a reason → add an example → consider another opinion.