



By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak
COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: Every day my co-workers stay late because no one wants to be the first one or only one to leave on time. This is irritating to me because I have family commitments, plus, I get my work done on time. When I was hired I was told the boss will notice if you leave early--and early also means “on time.” So everyone always stays at least 30 minutes to an hour late. How can I break this cycle without appearing to sneak out early?

HOMEWARD BOUND



DEAR HOMEWARD BOUND: I also experienced the same thing when I was a rat racer. It seemed like there was an unwritten rule that if you wanted to advance you had to stay late because everyone stayed late. And sometimes the same thing applied to arriving early in the morning; if you were seen coming to work on time, you were considered late.

As I moved up the leadership ladder, I did stay late on occasion but mainly because I wanted to. It gave me time to think about things and plan for the next day. I didn't mind it because I enjoyed

Should I stay or should I go?

the quiet time, allowing me to collect my thoughts and think clearly. Plus, doing this eliminated my late-night worries. When I left my office, my brain was wiped clean of work-related issues, allowing me to be mentally energized for personal things like taking my dog to the park, spending time with loved ones, shooting hoops with the kids in the neighborhood, attending a sporting event, reading a book, or watching one of my favorite television shows.

On the other hand, though, I hardly ever arrived to work early unless I had to attend an early meeting. In those instances, I'd get to my office about 20 minutes early (30 minutes early if I was running the meeting). Earlier arrivals than necessary were simply a waste of my personal morning time. I'd rather spend an extra 30 minutes at home watching the news than sitting in my office for 30 minutes when nothing was going on yet.

Your dilemma is not really all that unusual. In many places, people think that leaving early (or on time) will draw undue attention to them, making them seem to be shirkers or slackers. However, if someone were to actually leave work on time, doing it with confidence and

without hesitation, negative perceptions can be avoided. Just make sure your required work is finished and you're not sneaking out the back door.

Here's what I recommend for you: Either leave at normal quitting time or leave earlier in incremental fashion. If choosing to leave on time, be bold about it. Perhaps you may even say: “Last one to leave turns out the lights.” Once one person displays the courage to leave on time, others typically follow suit.

If you decide to take the incremental approach, do it in 5-minute increments. For instance, if you normally leave 30 minutes late, begin leaving 25 minutes late. After a few days, leave 20 minutes late, then 15 minutes late, and so on, until you're eventually leaving on time. This tactic will be less noticeable and people will grow accustomed to your earlier departures. Before you know it, you'll be leaving on time every day and so will they!



For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.