

Office icon – the shirker

There are a myriad strategies of work avoidance, and we've all employed them in some way or another, probably even at some point today, possibly even right now – perhaps you're reading this to avoid something more pressing, something more taxing. Possibly even your tax return. Although if you haven't done that by now, you really are a class A shirker and you probably owe at least £100 in fines to the Inland Revenue.

There are a number of distinct levels involved in shirking. The ultimate, level one, is the sickie, which involves simply not coming into the office at all. Many workers have perfected the fine art of the faint croaky voice for the early morning phone call to the office, while racking their brains to invent the least suspect of excuses – the sudden onset of "food poisoning", a mysterious "migraine", "women's problems" (good if you have a male boss) or "swine flu" (especially good if you're planning on taking at least a week off). For almost all of the above read "hangover". Other tactics include: my child is sick, my uncle has died, the boiler has exploded, or, one of my personal favourites, I'm locked in the house. Australia actually pioneered sanctioned "duvet days", which essentially legitimises the shirking spirit, thereby taking away its allure – just like when your parents say it's okay to stay up late and watch a movie with the babysitter because it's new year's eve, and maybe even have a glass of buck's fizz, which sends you instantly running up the stairs to bed cringing with embarrassment.

Level two involves partial absence from the office, preferably for the morning. Invented "meetings" or "appointments", whether work-related or personal, are a popular strategy –

again, for all of the above read "hangover", or "can't be arsed to get out of bed, it's cold, it's raining, and I don't feel like it". Commuting also offers a number of excuses for late arrival, including "leaves on the line", "the wrong kind of snow", "my bus fell over", etc. Just below this level (level two and half, if you will) is early departure from the office at the end of the day, again for a "meeting", a "doctor's appointment", an "osteopath appointment", etc – for all of the above, read "going to the pub to meet a mate" or, particularly on a Friday, "getting an early train out of town for the weekend".

Level three shirking involves being "present" at the office, but not actually at your desk. "Internal meetings", "business lunches" (read extended lunch in the pub/shopping/sleeping in the park), coffee/tea runs, frequent trips to the loo... all offer ample opportunities for the experienced shirker.

Level four shirking involves being "present" at the office, and at your desk, but only in body, certainly not in mind. In this category Google comes into its own – the ultimate way to appear to be "researching" while hunting for the cheapest flights to Ibiza. And then there are the more obvious portals of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Ebay and stuffonmycat.com, all of which can while away the hours until home time, ensuring that not a single minute of the day is wasted on that dirty word, "work".

So now you know how's it's done (as if you didn't know already). Happy shirking.