NEWS LESSON

What Does Your Job Title Leave Out?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What do people learn about you when you tell them your job?
2. Which part of your life would you mention first to someone new?
3. Would you enjoy a hobby more if nobody asked whether you were good at it?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**prestige**	☐	A	not safe or certain, such as a job that might end soon
2	**narrative**	☐	B	something that makes a situation harder to deal with
3	**obsessed**	☐	C	one part or side of a larger issue
4	**redundancy**	☐	D	thinking about one thing all the time
5	**dimension**	☐	E	a story, or the way events are told as a story
6	**insecure**	☐	F	the respect and admiration that a job or person gets
7	**complication**	☐	G	losing your job because the company no longer needs you
8	**networking**	☐	H	meeting people to make useful contacts for your work

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The first question strangers ask is often about work. For people whose job fills the week, losing it can take colleagues, routine and status as well as a salary.

1 "What do you do?" is an easy way to start a conversation. The answer usually names a job, although it leaves out most of a life. When work fills the week and supplies the people someone knows, that convenient introduction can start to feel like the whole story.

2 Try turning the question round: 'What has been keeping you busy lately?' The answers might reveal interests and responsibilities that a title leaves out.

3 A 2023 Pew Research Center survey found that 39% of US employees who were not self-employed regarded their job or career as extremely or very important to their overall identity. The figure is not evidence that everyone is obsessed with work. It does, however, illustrate how deeply professional roles can become woven into people's understanding of themselves.

4 This attachment is not inherently unhealthy. Meaningful work can create competence, belonging and pride, while specialised skills may take years to develop. A teacher might value opening opportunities for students; an engineer might enjoy solving problems that matter. Professional identity becomes more complicated when recognition, confidence and relationships depend almost entirely on continuing in the same role. There is a further complication: professional identity is often reinforced by institutions. Job applications, networking events and social media profiles encourage us to package a complicated life into a neat career narrative.

5 Redundancy and retirement reveal the fragility of that arrangement. A person can lose not only income but also colleagues, status, daily routines and a familiar answer to the question of who they are. Career changes, meanwhile, may feel like personal failures even when they are sensible responses to economic circumstances or changing ambitions.

6 The issue also has a social dimension. Occupational prestige can influence how others treat us, although the importance of a person's work to society does not always line up with its salary. Someone who performs essential but poorly paid labour deserves no less respect than somebody with an impressive title. A wider definition of achievement need not diminish professional ambition. It may simply make people less vulnerable when a promotion falls through or an industry changes beyond recognition.

7 Professional identity is also shaped by the assumptions other people make. Employment frequently operates as a shortcut for estimating education, income or status, even though those judgements can be unreliable and socially divisive. Meanwhile, unpaid contributions such as caring for relatives, raising children and supporting community organisations may be demanding without carrying the prestige of a formal title.

8 The language of identity can therefore reinforce a hierarchy of occupations while overlooking much of the work that holds societies together. It also matters how freely individuals can choose their relationship with employment. Somebody supporting a family through insecure jobs has different options from a professional considering an early retirement. Encouraging a wider sense of self is valuable, but it should not become another individual responsibility imposed on people whose lives are already constrained by economic circumstances.

9 A broader identity is more resilient, and gives a person more to fall back on: friend, learner, parent, neighbour, artist or simply someone with values that survive changes in employment. Perhaps the healthiest relationship with work is neither total devotion nor indifference. It is allowing a career to contribute to a meaningful life without making it the only source of meaning.

Sources: Pew Research Center. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer implies that a wider sense of self can protect people against career setbacks. T F NG
2. The writer argues that a broader identity is something everyone can easily achieve. T F NG
3. The Pew survey found that people in higher-paid jobs were more attached to their work. T F NG
4. The text suggests that a person's salary is not always a fair reflection of how much their work matters to society. T F NG
5. The writer claims that valuing life beyond work would weaken professional ambition. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

constrained	**devotion**	**diminish**	**hierarchy**	**imposed**	**indifference**	**inherently**
vulnerable						

1. A single bad review is unlikely to _____ a reputation built over thirty years.
2. Workers on short-term contracts are especially _____ to sudden changes in the labour market.
3. The new rules were _____ on staff without any consultation.
4. There is nothing _____ dishonest about advertising, although it can be used dishonestly.
5. In many companies, an informal _____ decides whose opinion carries weight in meetings.
6. Open criticism can be answered, but quiet _____ about the outcome leaves managers with nothing to work with.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Their emotional _____ to the company made redundancy harder to accept. (ATTACH)
2. Debates about who deserves higher pay are often _____ and bitter. (DIVIDE)
3. The downturn exposed the _____ of many small firms. (FRAGILE)
4. After the third failed project, colleagues began to question the manager's professional _____. (COMPETENT)
5. Her _____ plan to retrain as a doctor at fifty surprised everyone. (AMBITION)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Look for fixed pairs where another verb would sound odd, even if the meaning is almost the same.

cast	command	deal	lend	pay	pose	take

1. A single setback should not _____ a heavy toll on someone's confidence.
2. Senior surgeons _____ respect from colleagues without ever asking for it.
3. Losing a job can _____ serious doubt on a person's sense of purpose.
4. Employers who _____ lip service to wellbeing often change nothing.
5. A career break can _____ a serious risk to people without savings.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What is a better opening question than "What do you do?"?
2. Could loving a job make it harder to take a break from it?
3. What would you want to keep if your work changed completely?

9 Role-play: a promotion or a free evening?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the manager

You want to offer your employee a promotion. It means longer hours and no more free evenings. Explain why they are right for the job. Ask what worries them, and try to find a solution.

Student B · the employee

You'd like the promotion, but you volunteer three evenings a week and your work is not the whole of your life. Explain what matters to you and ask for changes.

Useful phrases

Thanks, I'm really pleased you asked.
I'd love the job, but I'm worried about the hours.
What matters most to me is my life outside work.
We're hoping you'll take it on.
Could we try fewer evenings for a trial period?
I'll think it over and let you know.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree, and who gave way more?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 F · 2 E · 3 D · 4 G · 5 C · 6 A · 7 B · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 diminish · 2 vulnerable · 3 imposed · 4 inherently · 5 hierarchy · 6 indifference

6 Word forms

1 attachment · 2 divisive · 3 fragility · 4 competence · 5 ambitious

7 Language focus

1 take · 2 command · 3 cast · 4 pay · 5 pose

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