NEWS LESSON

The First Question People Ask at a Party



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	**survey**	☐	A	the chance to do or say what you want
2	**identity**	☐	B	a person who works without being paid because they want to help
3	**volunteer**	☐	C	good at thinking of new and interesting ideas
4	**creative**	☐	D	good things about a person, such as being kind
5	**freedom**	☐	E	people who look after someone who is old, ill or very young
6	**qualities**	☐	F	a set of questions asked to many people to find out what they think
7	**relative**	☐	G	who you are, and what makes you different from other people
8	**carers**	☐	H	a person in your family, such as an aunt or a cousin

3 Read

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

We ask about work before anything else. In a 2023 American survey, 39% of employees called their job very or extremely important to their identity.

1 At a party, you meet someone new. After asking their name, what do you usually ask? For many people, the next question is about work. We often talk about our jobs before we talk about our interests, families or dreams. But does a job really tell someone who we are?

2 Work is a big part of adult life. We spend many hours doing it, and it can give us friends, confidence and a reason to get up in the morning.

3 In a 2023 American survey by Pew Research Center, 39% of employees who were not self-employed said their job or career was very or extremely important to their identity.

4 For some people, this is a good thing. A nurse may feel proud to help patients. A musician might love being known for their music. A skilled worker may enjoy solving difficult problems. Being good at a job can make someone feel useful.

5 However, problems can appear when work becomes the most important part of life. What happens if someone loses their job, takes up a new career or retires? They might lose more than an income. They may also miss their daily routine and the feeling that others need them.

6 Other parts of life matter too. A person can be a parent, a neighbour, a volunteer, a football fan or a friend. They may be creative, funny or kind without receiving any money for those qualities. Having several interests can make change easier.

7 A job title can also hide important details about a person. Two people may both work in offices, but have very different lives. One might spend weekends looking after an older relative, while the other teaches children to play football. People who do not have paid jobs can still work hard at home or in their communities.

8 Parents and carers often do important work that does not appear on a business card. Some people feel proud when others ask about their career. Others may find the question uncomfortable, especially if they are looking for work. A more open question can give people freedom to talk about the part of life that matters most to them.

9 Perhaps the question at a party should not always be, 'What do you do?' We could ask, 'What do you enjoy?' instead. A career can be an important chapter in someone's life. It does not have to be the whole story.

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 says that having several interests can make change easier. T F NG
2. The survey asked only people who work for themselves. T F NG
3. Most employees in the survey said they were happy at work. T F NG
4. Two people with office jobs can have very different lives. T F NG
5. The writer thinks people should never ask about work at a party. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

confidence	dreams	income	neighbour	proud	routine	skilled

1. After he retired, he missed the daily _____ of getting up early and going to work.
2. Her parents were very _____ of her when she finished university.
3. Without a regular _____, it is hard to pay the rent and buy food.
4. Passing the driving test gave him more _____ to drive on his own.
5. After years of training, he is now a _____ electrician who can repair almost anything.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. My uncle _____ from the bank last year, and now he has more free time. (RETIRE)
2. We _____ at a party last Saturday. (MEET)
3. She _____ me that she enjoys her work. (TELL)
4. He _____ children to play football every weekend. (TEACH)
5. After a long search, Tom _____ a job in a small shop. (FIND)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some verbs go with certain words as a pair. Learn the pair together, not each word alone.

ask	give	hard	hold	make	spend	take

1. At a party, people usually _____ a question about work first.
2. Most adults _____ many hours at work every week.
3. My neighbour is retired, but she still works _____ in the garden.
4. A hobby can help you _____ new friends.
5. Retired people often _____ part in clubs and volunteer groups.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 routine · 2 proud · 3 income · 4 confidence · 5 skilled

6 Verb forms

1 retired · 2 met · 3 told · 4 teaches · 5 found

7 Language focus

1 ask · 2 spend · 3 hard · 4 make · 5 take

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