NEWS LESSON

Finished Your Work, but Can You Go Home?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you leave work on time if your manager stayed late?
2. What makes someone look busy without getting much done?
3. Would you prefer a shorter day or more freedom over your hours?

2 Key words

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

1	**disloyal**	☐	A	the results of something that happened
2	**colleagues**	☐	B	able to do as well as other companies, or better
3	**campaigns**	☐	C	a part of the government
4	**ministry**	☐	D	not faithful to your company or your team
5	**survey**	☐	E	being ready to work hard for something
6	**competitive**	☐	F	plans to make many people support an idea
7	**commitment**	☐	G	people you work with
8	**consequences**	☐	H	a set of questions asked to many people

3 Read

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

The work is done and the manager is still at the desk. Leaving can feel harder than it should.

1 Imagine your work is finished and your bag is packed. But your manager is still at their desk, so you sit down again and pretend to be busy. Some workers in Japan describe this situation. In some offices, employees have felt that leaving first looks disloyal, even when there is nothing useful left to do. After work, there may also be pressure to join colleagues for drinks. The result is a long day in which time at the office can matter more than the work itself.

2 That culture has had serious consequences. Japan has a word, "karoshi", which means death from overwork. Extremely long hours and work-related stress can damage both physical and mental health. The government has introduced rules and campaigns to reduce overtime, encourage holidays and make workplaces safer. Yet changing a rule is easier than changing the silent expectations between a worker, a manager and a team.

3 In October 2026, Japan's health and labour ministry published another report on preventing deaths and illnesses linked to excessive work. The report examined workers' compensation cases and efforts to improve working conditions. It showed that the problem has not gone away, even though some employers have changed how they operate.

4 At the same time, Japan faces a shortage of workers. Its population is ageing, and many industries are finding it difficult to take on staff. Some businesses believe that giving employees more choice about working longer hours could help them remain competitive. In September 2026, the government changed the way it advises companies about a recommended monthly overtime limit. That was not the same as removing all legal limits, but it worried people who had fought for better working conditions.

5 Not every worker wants the same arrangement. In a labour ministry survey reported in March 2026, 30% of respondents said they wanted to work fewer hours, while about 11% wanted to work more. Many were happy with their current hours. Younger workers may also have different expectations about free time, family life and the relationship between work and personal identity. Some employers are responding with more flexible schedules and less formal office rules.

6 The difficulty is finding a balance between what businesses need and what people can reasonably give. A shorter working day is not automatically a happier one, especially if employees must complete the same amount of work under more pressure. But long hours are not proof of commitment either. Japan's debate asks a question that matters in every country: should success at work be measured by the hours people spend at their desks, or by the quality of what they do?

Sources: Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

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

1. Japan has a word for death caused by working too much. T F NG
2. The government has removed all legal limits on overtime. T F NG
3. More workers in the survey wanted to work fewer hours than wanted to work more. T F NG
4. The survey asked workers how much money they earn. T F NG
5. The text says a shorter working day always makes people happier. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

balance	contract	expectations	overtime	pressure	salary	shortage

1. A _____ of drivers means that some buses are cancelled every week.
2. Hours you work after your normal day, usually for extra money, are called _____ .
3. The team is under great _____ to finish the project before Friday.
4. Nobody wrote it down, but every new worker learns the team's _____ : arrive early and never leave first.
5. Good managers try to find a _____ between hard work and rest.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Many employees have _____ that leaving first looks bad. (FEEL)
2. The government has _____ new rules to protect workers. (INTRODUCE)
3. In October 2026, another report on overwork _____ in Japan. (PUBLISH)
4. Its population _____ , and workers are hard to find. (AGE)
5. Some workers feel they must stay late _____ their manager happy. (KEEP)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some words need a small word after them. Learn the pair together, for example 'good at'.

about at for from into of on

1. Many workers are worried _____ losing their jobs.
2. Japan is short _____ workers in many industries.
3. Some employees depend _____ overtime pay.
4. The country is famous _____ its long working hours.
5. Many workers suffer _____ stress.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. What should a workplace reward besides time at a desk?
2. Would you enjoy after-work events if everyone expected you to attend?
3. What would make leaving on time feel normal?

9 Role-play: can I leave on time?

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

Student A · the manager

Your employee wants to leave at five every day. The team is busy and you often stay late yourself. Ask at least two questions before you decide. You can say yes, no, or yes with a condition.

Student B · the employee

You finish your work by five, but nobody leaves before the manager. Ask to leave on time. Explain why it matters to you and how you will keep the work up to date.

Useful phrases

I was hoping to leave at five every day.
I've finished everything on my list.
Are you worried about how it looks?
I'd be happy to try it for a month.
I'm afraid we can't, because we're short of staff.
Could we find a compromise?

Afterwards, tell the class: did the manager say yes, and was it a fair decision?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 shortage · 2 overtime · 3 pressure · 4 expectations · 5 balance

6 Verb forms

1 felt · 2 introduced · 3 was published · 4 is ageing or is aging · 5 to keep

7 Language focus

1 about · 2 of · 3 on · 4 for · 5 from

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