

lingua business

You Must Be a Lazy Spaniard

By Paul Gibson



"Let's stop by VIP's for a quick drink before we go!"

"Sounds great. Let me stop by the bank first, because I have to exchange some money..."

"I think they're closed."

"No, that can't be, it's only three o'clock in the afternoon..."

All too often the story repeats itself, again and again and again. And now there are reports out that say "Spain is losing productivity" year by year...some are even calling us "the lazy bones" of Europe. Where else can you go on holiday for a month, to say nothing of the weeks of vacation most can take at Easter or Christmas time? Uh oh, aren't we forgetting the extra three or four days to celebrate our town's patron saint... and what about our "national" holidays?

How many days a year do you really work? Time to get out the calculator, and start comparing our timetable or schedules with everyone else. Okay, for starters, there are 52 weeks in a year, and five working days, (for most of us). But then again, maybe those 5 days are really 4 ½ days. So now let's do the math: $4.5 \times 52 = 234$ days. Now let's subtract vacation time (20 days), national holidays (+/- 14 days), and oh yes, the other 2 or 3 days for our town saints or regional heroes. Now we are

at the 199-198 day mark. So there are 365 days in a year, so we are working exactly 54% of the year.

Is Spain alone on this? Probably not, but ALMOST! Yes, there are other European countries where people take long holidays, but they are not suffering the same loss of productivity. This is probably because they are countries that have learned the beauty (or ugliness) of 24-hour shops with day and night shifts, working on Saturdays, etc. to make up for time lost.

Is there something wrong here? The average Spaniard has started to work longer and longer office hours, while "business" hours do not change. This means that unless your bank, your company, etc has changed their business hours, they are probably not making more money (nor paying you more money) to keep their doors open. So even if you put more hours in, you are never going to see the fruits of a longer workday.

Many contend that it's not TIME but a question of the QUALITY OF TIME, or the effectiveness with which you do your job. Okay, now you are going to hate me for this, but I am going to repeat the same thing over and over again: Look at the Germans, the English, the Americans, etc. They all have 5-day work weeks, and after you have been working a while, you may even have three weeks of vacation, but what do they do that's different? While they are in the office, they actually work! When the whistle blows at five o'clock you are out the door! Your boss kicks you out of the office! And if you haven't finished your work...well, you have not been as productive as you should have been!

Now, don't compare us to the Americans and the Germans, or the Brits: SPAIN IS DIFFERENT! Spain is different, but if you are looking for productivity, look at your nearest success stories and instead of getting jealous, do what they are doing! This is like the old story about the young boy who says to his mother, "Mum, I can't figure out why my watch doesn't work, I already took it apart and washed it with soap and water three times!" Time for some self-criticism to reach some real solutions before we fall behind.