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INTRODUCTION

How Work Is Replacing Religion

What happens to us, and what happens to religion, when people worship work? *Work Pray Code* explores how the lives of Silicon Valley tech workers are "transformed"—they say—by the religion that their employers offer on the job. On paper, Silicon Valley is one of the least religious places in America. People there are more likely than other Americans to claim no religious affiliation, or declare themselves to be atheist or agnostic. Given those statistics, I expected Silicon Valley to be a godless place. Instead, I discovered that it is one of the most religious places in America. In the course of my research for this book, I met people like the thirty-two-year-old entrepreneur John Ashton (not his real name),* who left his tight-knit evangelical community in Georgia to move to Silicon Valley—where he traded his Christianity for an even more zealous faith in the eventual IPO of his start-up. As with so many others, John's new faith is sustained by a corporate "faith community," which gives him a strong sense of belonging, identity, and meaning, much like his church back in Georgia.

I also met other people who described profound spiritual transformations, such as the twenty-seven-year-old German engineer Hans Schneider. Emotionally abused by his parents as a boy and bullied by classmates,

* I have changed the names of all interviewees and their companies, as well as characteristics that may make them identifiable.

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Hans grew up with a profound sense of worthlessness and self-hate. He finally started "healing" from these wounds when the CEO of his start-up put Hans in a Buddhist mindfulness program at the company's time and expense. Now, not only is Hans "more whole and more spiritual"; he's risen up the ranks to become the head of engineering.

Many others talked to me about their work in spiritual terms. For instance, Doug Robinson calls himself the "head pastor" of the start-up he founded. Management, he claims, is a lot like ministry. With the help of a Buddhist teacher, Doug has developed a professional development program for his team, one that integrates Buddhist-inspired teachings and practices. The program helps employees "connect to their authentic selves," he says, so they can invest their "whole selves" in work. Doug quotes the Buddha more than he does Andrew Carnegie, Peter Drucker, or Tim Ferriss and describes his work as "partnering with the Universe."

Like John, Hans, and Doug, few of the people I met came from Silicon Valley. They described themselves as becoming more "whole," "spiritual," and "connected" after moving there. Most did not identify with a religion, belong to a religious congregation, or attend religious services. Their spiritual transformations didn't happen at a church, temple, mosque, dharma center, or synagogue. Rather, they took place at work.

But tech workers channeling their religious needs into work is only part of the story. The other part has to do with why Hans's CEO paid to send him to a Buddhist mindfulness program. The answer, I came to realize, is that companies have taken up pastoral and spiritual care as a way to make their employees more productive. One human resources director told me that her job was to "nurture the souls" of the employees. One firm I visited sponsors weekly meditation sessions for its employees to make them more focused. Tech companies often hire executive coaches, who serve as what one human resources director described as "spiritual advisers" to senior leaders. These "spiritual advisers" train executives in spiritual practices that help them align their work with their "calling" in life. The benefits packages at several companies I spent time at include the time and funds to allow employees to attend spiritual and religious retreats. Some firms have dedicated positions such as

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"chief spiritual officer" and "chief mindfulness officer" to manage their employees. In many tech workplaces, meditation rooms are as common as the iconic Ping-Pong table.

What's more, companies are actively bringing religion, particularly Buddhism, to their employees. One firm I visited sponsors weekly "dharma talks," where employees meditate and reflect on the teachings of the Buddha. Google sponsors Search Inside Yourself, a program that brings in Buddhist teachers to teach Googlers meditation, which employees affectionately call "church." The tech giant Salesforce invited over thirty monks from Plum Village, the order of the famous Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh, to chant and teach at the meetings of their annual conferences in 2017 and 2018. At companies such as LinkedIn, Buddhist virtues such as compassion and mindfulness are celebrated as part of a company culture that supposedly gives them a competitive advantage. "The workplace," one tech executive told me, "is the hotbed of spirituality" in Silicon Valley.

It is easy to dismiss all this as simply part of the strange antics of a unique, privileged enclave. Media depictions remind us that Silicon Valley is not the *real* America. And there is some truth to this. Not many American firms, after all, have unlimited vacation, celebrity chefs, pets at work, and Buddhist monks as consultants. While the rest of corporate America is slaving away in colorless cubicles, Silicon Valley tech workers are getting massages, meditating, and playing foosball at work, we are told.

But tech workers in Silicon Valley are not so different from highly skilled professionals in other parts of the country. In surveys, when asked what brings their lives meaning, Americans point to their jobs and careers just as frequently as they do their children and grandchildren.[1] Companies in other sectors and in regions of the country far from Silicon Valley are also trying to attend to their employees' spiritual needs with an eye on the bottom line. Firms such as Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, and Wal-Mart have hired chaplains to help workers deal with spiritual issues.[2] Not only Google but also companies such as Aetna, General Mills, and Goldman Sachs are teaching Buddhist spiritual practices such as mindfulness to optimize employee performance.

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Silicon Valley helps us to see a broader trend, one that has eluded scholars of work and religion alike: subtly but unmistakably, *work is replacing religion*. Over the past forty years, work has extracted ever more of the time and energy of highly skilled Americans, crowding out other commitments, especially religion. In 1990, only 8 percent of all Americans claimed no religious affiliation.[3] Today nearly a quarter of them do.[4] The number of "religious nones" has risen fastest in places, like the Bay Area, that have a large high-skilled population. But numbers can lie. As we shall see, high-skilled professionals haven't abandoned religion. Instead, they are looking to the workplace to slake their thirst for belonging, identity, purpose, and transcendence. More and more, companies have become America's new temples, churches, mosques, and synagogues. Work has become a spiritual practice that inspires religious fervor. People are not "selling their souls" at work. Rather, *work is where they find their souls*.

Work Pray Code reveals how tech workers are finding their souls at work. But it's about more than the engineers, programmers, and executives who work at companies like Facebook and Google. Through the lives of Silicon Valley tech workers, the book tells a story of how the expansion of work and the decline of religion is reconfiguring the lives of high-paid skilled workers in late capitalism. This is a familiar tale to scholars and nonscholars alike. Many Americans experience the expansion of work and the decline of religion in their personal struggles for "work-life balance." Work is taking more of their hours and energy, leaving less time for families and friendships. Religion is one of many things in the ledger of "life" that gets sidelined by work. The expansion of work and the decline of religion is also the familiar story social theorists tell about secularization in the West. According to sociologist Max Weber, capitalism forms an "iron cage" of bureaucratic rationalism that "disenchants" the world of the magical "otherworldliness" of religion.[5]

The lives of high-skilled professionals like John, Hans, and Doug suggest that work's influence is indeed expanding. It does so, however, not by extracting and "caging" the human spirit, but by satisfying high-skilled Americans' social, emotional, and spiritual needs. Work, it appears, is fulfilling, not depleting, their souls.

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What happens when work is the place where Americans find their souls? The book is organized around three facets of this question. First, it shows how the experience of work changes when companies try to fulfill the social, spiritual, and emotional needs of their employees. Second, it assesses how religion and spirituality adapt when they become a part of work. And third, it explores how the "religion of work" is altering the very social fabric of America. Through the lens of Silicon Valley's tech industry, *Work Pray Code* examines how the meanings of work, religion, and community are transforming in late capitalism.

The Expansion of Work

How did work become a place where highly skilled Americans find their souls? To answer this question, we need to understand how white-collar work has changed in relation to other social institutions, especially religion, in late capitalism. More Americans took on white-collar managerial and professional occupations starting in the 1940s.[6] Writing in 1951, sociologist C. Wright Mills described work very differently from the way that Silicon Valley tech workers like John, Hans, and Doug do. White-collar work, he claimed, was soul crushing. In the big bureaucratic organizations where they worked, white-collar workers "habitually submit to the orders of others," selling their "time, energy and skill to the power of others."[7] Under the oppressive weight of the corporation, workers lost their individuality, freedom, and personhood. The faceless, bureaucratic corporation so squeezed the quintessential American spirit of independence and entrepreneurialism out of employees that Mills characterized that time as the "rise of the little man."[8] "Underneath virtually all experience of work today," he wrote, "there is a fatalistic feeling that work *per se* is unpleasant."[9]

If work crushed the soul, then it was in the world outside of work where white-collar workers found their souls and built their "real" lives, according to Mills. "Work," he wrote, "becomes a sacrifice of time, necessary to building life outside of it."[10] The typical 1950s white-collar worker, who was White and male, worked from nine to five, forty hours a week.[11] Except for executives, work was understood to be contained

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in one part of a worker's life. This is one big reason the 1950s were also the years American civic participation reached its greatest height. In these organizations outside of work, white-collar workers *recovered* their souls and became something more than another faceless worker in what Mills called the "the great salesroom" of the company.[12] The most important of these were religious congregations. During the 1950s, nearly half of Americans attended religious services weekly.[13] Church memberships grew at a rate faster than the general population.[14] As young, White, middle-class families migrated to the newly developed suburbs, they built their communities around their Protestant and Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues.[15] Through them, they met their friends, found their spouses, raised their children, and created a sense of belonging and identity in the American experiment of suburban living. Through these faith communities they found meaning in life, from baptism at the beginning, to burial at the end, and everything in between. To not participate in religion was to risk both social and existential anomie. In the 1950s, Americans also belonged to multiple social clubs—bowling clubs, poker clubs, softball leagues, workers' unions—but among them religion was the most central to creating community and finding meaning in life.[16] In the 1950s, work was only one of many organizations that the white-collar worker belonged to. Work was reined in, not only by a nine-to-five work culture, but by the nearly compulsory draw of religion.

The forty-hour workweek, and the life associated with it, faded in the late twentieth century, when work expanded, demanding more time and energy, especially from high-skilled Americans.[17] Who worked longer hours changed. In the 1940s, high-school dropouts were more likely than college graduates to work over forty-eight hours a week. By 1980, the situation had switched: college graduates were more likely to work over forty-eight hours a week. And by 2000, over 40 percent of male college graduates did.[18] What's more, those in the top 20 percent of income earners—largely skilled professionals and managers—were *twice* as likely to work long hours than those in the bottom 20 percent.[19]

The experience of one Silicon Valley engineer is now the reality for many professionals: "No one works forty hours a week today. Fifty

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hours is a good week. Sixty to sixty-five hours is more typical." In a survey of sixteen hundred managers and professionals, business scholar Leslie Perlow found that 92 percent reported working fifty or more hours a week. And one-third logged sixty-five hours or more. But even these hours do not reflect the twenty to twenty-five hours that most reported monitoring their work, but not actually working.[20] We're at a place today where "professionals," according to economist Heather Boushey, "devote most of their waking hours to their careers."[21]

The demands of work ballooned for high-skilled workers as a result of several changes in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century.[22] For one, the need for professionals grew as the American economy shifted from an industrial to a postindustrial economy. Between 1960 and 2000, professionals increased from about one-tenth to one-quarter of the American working population.[23] With the rise of global competition starting in the 1980s, companies responded by downsizing, creating "mean and lean" companies where employees were expected to do two or three times as much work as before. Mergers, acquisitions, downsizing, deregulation, and "investor capitalism" led to layoffs of white-collar workers but created longer work hours for those who survived the cuts.[24] On top of that, the advent of technologies such as email, smart phones, and video conferencing have intensified and drawn out work. Companies now expect employees to be on call at all times, erasing the distinction between work and home. Work has taken over so much of some lives that according to one study, 26 percent of professionals and managers sleep with their smart phones.[25]

But there is another, less cited reason that professionals started working longer and harder—work became more rewarding and more fulfilling. This is especially true for high-skilled professionals in the last forty years relative to other occupational groups. Since 1980, wages have been stagnant or declining for most Americans, but they've ballooned among the top wage earners, who are largely professionals and managers.[26] The earnings of those in the top ninety-fifth percentile of workers (making more than $150,000 a year) rose at a rate almost four times higher than that of those at the fiftieth percentile.[27]

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So too, those in the higher income brackets have grown *even more* satisfied with their jobs in the last forty years. In a study measuring the job satisfaction of Californians in the twenty-year period from 1978 to 1998, workers in the top 20 percent of the income distribution (which includes professionals) became *more satisfied* with their jobs, while all others became less satisfied with their jobs.[28]

To be sure, the picture is not completely rosy for high-skilled professionals. They also struggle with consequences of globalization, downsizing, and the corporate culture: stress, tight deadlines, insecure employment, and difficulty balancing obligations with the family. Many feel that they work too long. Yet still, professionals claim that they "choose" to work overtime and that they find pleasure in their work. According to one study, the vast majority of professionals and managers state that they "usually" work overtime because they "enjoy work and their colleagues" to a far greater degree than do other occupational groups.[29]

What changed to make work so pleasurable and rewarding for high-skilled professionals? The economic transformation of the late twentieth century prompted companies to alter work, making it not only more demanding, but also more fulfilling for some, and less so for others, depending on where workers fit in the "skill divide." According to sociologist Arne Kalleberg, companies took two different management strategies depending on the skill level of their employees.[30] Some maximized profits by "low-road strategies"—reducing wages and deskilling, off-shoring, and subcontracting jobs—in short, minimizing costs by disinvesting in their workers. This has been the fate of many blue-collar jobs that were once "good jobs" offering decent pay, job security, benefits, and dignity. For people working in these jobs, work became more scarce, insecure, and unsatisfying.

Other companies took "high-road strategies" by investing especially in their high-skilled workers: rewarding them with higher wages, more skills and training, and greater autonomy over their work. Instead of treating their highly skilled professionals as "costs to be minimized," companies considered them as "assets" to invest in. Firms taking "high-road strategies" tended to be concentrated in knowledge-intensive

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industries, such as technology, that faced both global competition and frequent labor shortages.[31]

These companies introduced new incentive structures designed to make work more rewarding for high-skilled workers, despite greater demands and less security. For instance, in the late twentieth century, a growing number of Fortune 1000 firms instituted reward practices such as gainsharing, profit sharing, employee stock ownership plans, stock option plans, "pay-for-performance" programs, and nonmonetary recognition awards for performance.[32] Companies adopted "high-performance work systems" emphasizing mentoring, training, and learning. And they flattened the authority structure, removing middle management to prioritize team work, greater autonomy, and decentralized management.[33]

But to compete in the new global economy, company leaders felt they needed to do more than restructure the financial and professional incentives of work. They needed to transform their organizational cultures to extract the full discretionary effort of their skilled workers—to get employees to invest their *whole* selves—emotionally, socially, and spiritually—into their work. Starting in the 1980s, American firms looked to the Japanese, their fiercest competitors, as a model. Japanese firms had a competitive advantage over American firms, business experts claimed, because they emphasized unity and loyalty and were able to command deep sacrifice and commitment from its employees.[34] Popular best sellers like William Ouichi's *Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge*, argued that American firms should learn from the Japanese by creating similar strong cultures that cultivated belonging, loyalty, and shared goals and values among employees and management.[35]

What kind of organization could inspire that kind of sacrifice, faith, and commitment in its members? There was only one obvious answer in America—religion. In the late twentieth century, corporate managers started shifting their metaphor of employees in the company from cogs in an efficient, well-oiled machine, to something that resembled a faith community: members who *belong* to a shared community, and *believe* in a higher and transcendent goal.[36] In short, the task of modern

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management in late capitalism changed from organizing work to be more efficient, to making it *more meaningful*.[37]

Today, companies are not just economic institutions. They've become meaning-making institutions that offer a gospel of fulfillment and divine purpose in a capitalist cosmos.[38] Most Fortune 500 companies have adopted key elements of religious organizations—a mission, values, practices, ethics, and an "origin story."[39] Having a strong corporate culture that is meaningful, according to one study, can account for 20–30 percent of the differential in corporate performance when compared to "'culturally unremarkable' competitors."[40] Business leaders ought to take meaning making seriously, another study concludes, because nine of ten people are willing to earn less money for more meaningful work.[41] According to one leading business thinker, "Meaning is the new money."[42]

Contemporary ethnographic studies of professional work frequently allude to the religious nature of work. In a study of women executives, sociologist Mary Blair-Loy demonstrates how work provides a powerful form of meaning to the lives of the women executives. Work, Blair-Loy argues, is a form of devotion. "Schemas of devotion to work are like pseudo-religious articles of faith," she writes, "they promise to provide meaning to life and a secure connection to something outside themselves."[43] The executives in her study "lose" themselves in work. Work "induce[s] a powerful sense of transcendence," Blair-Loy writes.[44] It gives them a sense of identity, independence, recognition, community, and even "euphoria."[45]

Sociologist Gideon Kunda also describes the work of engineers in a Boston tech firm in religious language: "membership in Tech implies heavy involvements and a strong emotional bonding of the individual to the company, characterized in such terms as 'missionary zeal,' 'fierce loyalty,' and 'family affiliation.'"[46] Religious elements such as "ideology" and "ritual" in the company's culture produce what is tantamount to late capitalism's version of Émile Durkheim's collective effervescence, "the collapse of boundaries between the self and the organization," according to Kunda.[47]

The professionals that Blair-Loy and Kunda studied are actually not so different from other workers. When the Pew Research Center con-

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ducted an open-ended survey asking Americans what gives their lives meaning, 34 percent answered "career," making work one of the most important sources of meaning to Americans, second only to the family (at 69 percent).[48] What's more, work seems to mean the most to highly paid skilled workers. They are more likely to claim that work gives them a sense of identity rather than something they do for a living.[49] According to Reverend Scotty McLennan, who teaches at Stanford's business school, "business people spend the majority of their waking hours at work, and many of them want to find it meaningful."[50] Looking to work as a primary source of meaning among the highly skilled is an example of what political theorist Kathi Weeks calls "the postindustrial emphasis on work as a practice of self realization."[51] Seen within these larger patterns of American attitudes toward work, it is not strange that Silicon Valley tech workers are finding their souls at work. Rather, it reflects a broader trend of high-skilled Americans turning to work for spirituality and meaning in late capitalism.

Americans today are looking to work in order not only to believe in something, but also to *belong* to something. Stretched for time, busy Americans are finding community at work, and not in faith communities, sports leagues, neighborhoods, or clubs. When sociologist Maria Poarch asked the residents of a middle-class Boston suburb where they found their friends and source of community, the most popular answer was "work."[52] A real estate agent from the study reflected, "I very much belong to a community within my own office, within my own company, within my own industry. . . . Strangely enough I am unbelievably and sadly disconnected from the community that I live in, both because we've lost our religious pulls to one another and there is simply not the time."[53] In another study of professionals and religion, the authors conclude, "For many businesspeople, the corporation is the closest thing that they have to community after family."[54]

With the growth of job insecurity and the "gig economy," the social benefits of work are not equally enjoyed by everyone. Some suggest that work is not the source of community that it once was in the days of secure employment.[55] Yet outside of the family, work is still the major source of friendship for most Americans.[56] When asked where they met

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the two friends they socialize with most, the majority of working-age Americans answered work.[57] And community is still one of the top things that employees say that they look for in a job.[58] Even outside the workplace, work continues to be the locus of community in places like Silicon Valley, where work-oriented associations, networks, and gatherings such as hack-a-thons and meet-ups organize social life.[59]

To be sure, work has always been an important source of community and friendship. But not until the rise of the modern corporation did management learn to systematically mine the social needs of the human worker for productive labor.[60] Responding to global economic restructuring in the late twentieth century, many American companies redoubled their efforts to design family-like cultures that cultivated community, sociality, commitment, and loyalty from their employees.[61] Community, companies have learned, is good for business. According to a study by Gallup, employees who have close friends at work are more engaged and productive.[62] Even in Silicon Valley, where workers change jobs every three to five years, companies believe it pays to invest in the game rooms, cafeterias, social events, and social clubs that create community. Concerning the social offerings at her large tech firm, one human resources professional said, "I corral and channel [employees'] energy into not just the product, but to *experience* here!" It's no surprise that, in the carefully designed communities of Silicon Valley tech firms, over half of employees say they found their best friends at work.[63]

According to sociologist Arlie Hochschild, companies now meet the social needs of American workers better than families do.[64] Burdened by the overwhelming demands of family life today, the people in her study find pleasure, community, fulfillment, intimacy, and belonging in the "managed cheer" of the workplace rather than the chaos and stress of home. Having supplanted the loving and nurturing functions of the family, she concludes, "work may become their rock."[65] Political scientist Robert D. Putnam agrees: "Professionals and blue-collar workers alike are putting in long hours together, eating lunch and dinner together, traveling together, arriving early, and staying late. What is more, people are divorcing more often, marrying later (if at all), and living

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alone in unprecedented numbers. Work is where the hearth is, then, for many solitary souls."[66]

In short, over the last forty years, work has expanded in the lives of high-skilled professionals. Work takes more than any other institution today, but it also gives more than any other institution. High-skilled Americans are finding belonging, identity, meaning, and purpose at work. The case of Silicon Valley shows that many companies are happily assuming these expanded functions because they think it's profitable. According to senior human resources leaders at Facebook, "Today more companies are operating in knowledge and service economies. They're not just fulfilling basic needs; they're aiming to fulfill *every* need, providing conveniences like meals and gyms, and competing to be the best places to work." And, the Facebook leaders concluded, "from 1984 through 2011, those that won [the best places to work] outperformed their peers on stock returns by 2.3% to 3.8% per year."[67]

The holistic provisions of companies like Google and Facebook might seem new, but in fact they reflect trends long in the making. The Facebook leaders practically echo a corporate executive quoted in the nearly forty-year-old popular business classic *In Search of Excellence*: "Companies . . . have become sort of a community center for employees, as opposed to just a place to work. . . . They have become . . . mother institutions."[68]

The Decline and Diffusion of Religion

If work has expanded to become an institution that fulfills *every* human need as leaders at Facebook claim, what has happened to the other social institutions that organize human life? Conversely, if highly skilled Americans are giving all their time to work, what are they taking time from? If work expands, what contracts? This is the question that scholars of work and family have been asking for years. Work and family, they maintain, are competing commitments. The expansion of work has come at the cost of the family.[69] This is true, however, not only for the family, but also for other vital social institutions, especially religion.

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For most of the twentieth century, religious organizations were the original "mother institutions" in the United States. Even when religion declined dramatically in Western European countries as a result of industrialization, urbanization, and secularism, the United States remained exceptionally religious well into the late twentieth century: over 90 percent of Americans continued to claim a religious identity, and over 90 percent professed to believe in God or a higher power.[70] There's good reason for this. Religion has played a vital *social* function. It has been the primary source of community, belonging, identity, and meaning for Americans.[71] Writing in 1955, sociologist Will Herberg argued that through religion people found their place in American society.[72] Americans organized their personal, familial, and social lives around their religious identities as Protestant, Catholic, or Jew. Religion was so influential that it even determined how much money people made, who they voted for, where they lived, and who they would marry.[73]

But as Americans invest more of their time and energy into work, they are simultaneously disinvesting from the social dimensions of organized religion. As a result, religion has lost the influence it once had over the social lives and identities of Americans. Today, fewer Americans claim a religious affiliation than ever before. The fastest growing religious demographic in American society are people who claim no religious identity, a category sociologists call religious "nones." When the General Social Survey started collecting religious data in 1972, the proportion of "nones" in the American population was 7 percent, and it stayed steady there for about twenty years. But starting in the 1990s, "nones" have increased rapidly, so that in 1990 they were 9 percent, and by 2018, the religiously unaffiliated made up 23 percent of the American population.[74]

So too, fewer Americans are participating in religious organizations. Since the mid-1980s, religious service attendance has slowly declined.[75] In 1990, 35 percent of Americans attended religious services weekly or more compared to 27 percent in 2018.[76] Meanwhile, the number of Americans who never attend services increased dramatically, from 13 percent in 1990 to 30 percent in 2018.[77] Faith communities have felt the pinch. The median number of people involved in congregations has

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dropped.[78] And so has the time Americans devote to religious organizations. From 2003 to 2018, Americans spent *a quarter less time* participating in religious organizations on the weekends.[79]

To be sure, the expansion of work does not by itself explain religion's decline in the United States. Waning religious participation is a trend that some scholars date to the 1960s, before Americans started "overworking."[80] Moreover, since the mid-1970s, Americans have participated less in all types of civic organizations, not just religious ones.[81] Still, there is clear evidence that when people devote more time to work, they take it partly from the time they might have spent on religious activities. In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam attributes some of the drop in civic participation, including religious participation, to the increasing amount of time that Americans are spending at work. According to the General Social Survey, Americans who overwork attend religious services less. Between 1973 and 2018, of those working forty hours a week, 33 percent attended church once or month or more, compared to 24 percent among those working fifty hours a week.[82]

High-skilled and high-income Americans are especially apt to choose work over religion. An early study of lawyers, professors, and engineers found that men whose careers involved more training and socialization were more strongly bound to their professional community than to their religious community.[83] Several studies show that high wages reduce religious participation by encouraging people to substitute market work for religious activities.[84] In general, high-income Americans rank lowest among nearly all measures of religiosity—attendance, importance, belief, prayer, and so on.[85] What's more, it is the resource-intensive *social* demands of religion that compete with economic activity. A study examining the economic growth and religiosity of different countries found that while religious belief spurs economic growth, economic growth is negatively correlated with time-intensive religious attendance. The authors, economists Robert J. Barro and Rachel M. McCleary, concluded that "more church attendance signifies more resources used up by the religion sector."[86]

What's more, religious decline is most pronounced in what urban studies scholar Richard Florida calls "human capital clusters," geographic

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areas where knowledge industries concentrate.[87] These are metro areas that have a high proportion of highly skilled professionals: San Jose; Washington, DC; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Austin; and San Francisco. These "human capital clusters" have created their own cultures and institutions, including coffee shops and yoga studios, that support a lifestyle where religious organizations have become peripheral. The religiosity of metro areas is closely associated with occupations and socioeconomic class, Florida finds. Metro areas with higher religiosity tend to have lower incomes and education levels, and "working-class economies." Low-religiosity metro areas, on the other hand, have more college-educated, high-income workers in the knowledge economy.[88] Another study found that counties with higher religious adherence and denser concentrations of religious congregations have a smaller proportion of "creative class" workers and fewer patents.[89]

In the past, upwardly mobile Americans signified their changing status by "moving up" the religious ladder from more demanding to less demanding, higher-prestige denominations: Pentecostals became Baptists; Baptists became Methodists; and Methodists became Episcopalians. But today's highly skilled professionals are choosing to leave religion altogether. The decline of religious affiliation and participation, however, does not mean that religious needs have disappeared. They've just been displaced. As religious studies scholar Kathryn Lofton observes, "Where our social and ritual interests are placed now is not in denominational tradition but workplace culture."[90] Why should time-constrained professionals join a religion when work offers the same social, spiritual, and status-enhancing benefits?[91]

Just when work is replacing religion, religion is moving into the secular world, a trend I call *the secular diffusion of religion*.[92] And it is especially pronounced with Buddhism and Hinduism, whose religious practices are being severed from religious communities, and repackaged for business and therapeutic use. Fewer Americans are participating in organized religion, but they are still engaging in religious practices, largely Asian ones, through secular sources. For instance, meditation, a practice largely inspired by Buddhist and Hindu traditions, has exploded. In 2017, fully one in seven Americans said they meditated,[93] even though

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only one in seventy say they are Buddhist or Hindu.[94] Most Americans become exposed to Asian spiritual practices such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness, chanting "Om" or other Sanskrit mantras not through Hindu or Buddhist temples, but through secular institutions such as schools, workplaces, hospitals, gyms, and yoga studios, secular websites, and books.[95] Through these secular venues and mediums, Americans learn about Asian religious ideas such as dharma, moksha, enlightenment, and impermanence. They are exposed to Hindu and Buddhist deities such as Ganesh, Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, or the Buddha in yoga studios, spas, or therapists' offices. People don't belong to Asian religions but "consume" them through the "spiritual marketplace" of self-help books, retreats, therapeutic treatments, and self-improvement and motivational seminars and the like.[96] Moreover, there is a class dimension to this type of spirituality.[97] It's particularly prevalent among well-educated Westerners—who can afford the classes, workshops, and retreats.

Today, many high-skilled Americans are learning the Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation in the workplace. Companies like Aetna, McKinsey, and Nike have embraced mindfulness for its widely touted promises to enhance productivity and focus. One recent study found that 22 percent of American companies incorporate mindfulness practice, a number that although likely inflated, shows how popular the once obscure practice of elite Asian monastics has now become.[98]

To be sure, companies and other secular organizations are not teaching the same Buddhist mindfulness that monks practice in the mountain monasteries of Asia. It's a secularized, Westernized version, repurposed as a therapeutic and self-improvement practice.[99] As one mindfulness entrepreneur put it, it's a Buddhism that's had the religion "steam cleaned" out of it. This doesn't mean the absence or erasure of Buddhism, but the evolution of a new kind of Buddhism, one that has adopted the instrumental logic of work.[100] The corporate teaching of mindfulness is the logical consequence of work replacing religion—*religion is now a part of work*. Buddhism has found a new institutional home in the West, the corporation. Fewer Americans are praying in the pews these days. Instead, more are getting healed, actualized, and enlightened at work,

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through religious practices borrowed from religions that few of them actually profess.

The spiritual importance of the workplace today represents a monumental shift in the history of modern capitalism. When Max Weber studied the origins of the modern capitalist work ethic, he had to understand the world that seventeenth-century European workers lived in—one that revolved around the Christian church and its teachings. How, he asked, does religion organize people's work lives? Today in the late capitalist West, the spheres of religion and work are reversed. Religion exists in the sacred cosmos of a work-centered world. And to understand religion in the lives of high-skilled Americans, we must look at the institution of work. So instead of asking, as Weber did, how religion shapes work, the more relevant question of our time is: how does work organize people's religious lives?

It *is* strange that Silicon Valley tech workers are "finding their souls" at work. Not because it's a quirky thing that happens only in Silicon Valley. As I've argued, many high-skilled Americans are "finding their souls" at work. It is strange because it goes against our normative assumptions about the boundaries of work and religion. The problem is that these work-life boundaries no longer describe the lives of many high-skilled Americans. We speak incessantly about the need to restore "work-life balance" because we remain under the influence of a deeply ingrained view that work drains the self. But many highly skilled American workers no longer hold that view: work is where they find fulfillment. Rather than ridicule Silicon Valley tech workers for worshipping work, perhaps we should wonder whether they are harbingers of things to come—whether their orientation toward work may already be ours, too.

People finding their souls at work reflects the seismic shift in work and religion that has occurred in the last fifty years. Work has expanded in the lives of the highly skilled, by simultaneously extracting more of their time and energy *and* fulfilling more of their needs that religion once met. Conversely, religion has lost influence, and its power has been

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diffused through secular sources. Work is simultaneously displacing and absorbing religion.

What do we lose when work replaces religion? Workplace pundits celebrate the integration of practices like meditation and mindfulness into Silicon Valley. These practices have made the workplace more humane and holistic, they claim. And most of the people I spoke to agreed. They are delighted to find personal, social, and spiritual fulfillment at work. What's not to like about a company that "cares" for your mind, body, and spirit? This appears to be a win-win situation: people are happier, and companies are more profitable.

But could work be becoming *too* enchanting and *too* fulfilling? Things look different when we consider the larger social consequences of what I call *Techtopia*—an engineered society where people find their highest fulfillment in work. By taking care of the body, mind, and soul, tech companies have colonized the functions of other social institutions. In the stories that I will share, we see that as people invest more of their selves in work, they invest less of themselves in critical social institutions like the family, neighborhoods, and religion. And as the workplace expands to meet the holistic needs of its employees, the influence of other social institutions, such as religion, decline. At one time, religion was a sanctuary from, and even a prophetic critic of, the crushing instrumentalism of work. Now, not only is the workplace replacing religion, but it's conscripting religion into its service. *Work Pray Code* is a story of what happens when work takes over the institutions that shape our souls.

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