

Japan attempts to ease working hours

5th March, 2017



Japan's government has backed an initiative to ease the pressure on Japanese workers and simultaneously boost consumer spending. The new measure is called "Premium Friday". A

spokesperson from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said the campaign would encourage workers to leave work earlier on the last Friday of each month to relax and/or go shopping. Around 130 companies across Japan have signed up to participate in the initiative, including many major employers. Skeptics are unsure whether the scheme will succeed or not because of the infamous workaholic nature of Japanese workers. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters: "It will take time for Premium Friday to take root."

The idea for Premium Friday was partly prompted by the suicide of an employee who was continually required to work excessive overtime at the ad agency Dentsu. A court ruled the suicide was "death by overwork" and stressed the need to address what is a common problem in Japan - overworking. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is leading by example. He promoted the campaign by leaving the office early for a meditation session at a Tokyo temple at 3:30 p.m. Mr Suga said it was essential for both the government and the private sector to create an atmosphere where workers feel comfortable in leaving early. However, many workers said they would just have to work on Saturdays instead to finish their work.

Sources: JapanTimes.co.jp / reuters.com / JapanToday.com

Writing

It should be illegal for anyone to work over 35 hours a week. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

initiative / pressure / workers / consumer spending / campaign / relax / workaholic / suicide / employee / overtime / meditation / temple / private sector / atmosphere

True / False

- Japan wants to give workers time off and boost consumer spending. T / F
- Workers can now leave work early every Friday to go shopping. T / F
- About 130 companies have joined a scheme to let workers off early. T / F
- A spokesman said it would take time for the plan to take root. T / F
- The initiative was partly because of the suicide of a worker. T / F
- A court said the worker had not done too much overtime. T / F
- Japan's Prime Minister did not leave the office early. T / F
- Many workers said they would not go into work on Saturdays. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. backed | a. concept |
| 2. ease | b. become established |
| 3. skeptics | c. unreasonable |
| 4. infamous | d. judged |
| 5. take root | e. supported |
| 6. idea | f. doubters |
| 7. excessive | g. vital |
| 8. ruled | h. relieve |
| 9. essential | i. simply |
| 10. just | j. well-known |

Discussion – Student A

- What do you think about what you read?
- How much overtime is too much?
- Do employers have too much power over employees?
- How much of a problem is overworking in your country?
- What do you think of Shinzo Abe for leading by example?
- What would you do with a Friday afternoon off?
- Would you feel comfortable leaving work early?
- Why is Premium Friday at the end of the month when it's busy?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Japan's government has backed | a. root |
| 2. ease the | b. spending |
| 3. simultaneously boost consumer | c. workers feel comfortable |
| 4. Skeptics are | d. suicide of an employee |
| 5. It will take time for Premium Friday to take | e. is a common problem |
| 6. partly prompted by the | f. an initiative |
| 7. continually required to work | g. session |
| 8. the need to address what | h. pressure |
| 9. a meditation | i. excessive overtime |
| 10. create an atmosphere where | j. unsure |

Discussion – Student B

- How much pressure is there on workers?
- What do you think of the name 'Premium Friday'?
- How much effect do you think Premium Friday will have?
- Why are skeptics unsure about Premium Friday?
- Why are Japanese people seen as workaholics?
- What are the good and bad things about being a workaholic?
- How much of a workaholic are you?
- What advice do you have for Japanese workers?

Spelling

- backed an vtaieiniit
- ytnoaulusimsel boost consumer spending
- the campaign would aecgenour workers
- signed up to aitpacritpe
- the seechm will succeed
- the asnmfoui workaholic nature
- the iediucs of an employee
- work viscexees overtime
- the need to saesddr what is a common problem
- a meditation snsseio
- it was taeslenis
- private sceotr

Answers – Synonym Match

| | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. e | 2. h | 3. f | 4. j | 5. b |
| 6. a | 7. c | 8. d | 9. g | 10. i |

Role Play

Role A – Overtime

You think overtime is the biggest stress for workers. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them how their things can be less stressful. Also, tell the others which is the least stressful of these (and why): the boss, boredom or customers.

Role B – The Boss

You think the boss is the biggest stress for workers. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them how their things can be less stressful. Also, tell the others which is the least stressful of these (and why): overtime, boredom or customers.

Role C – Boredom

You think boredom is the biggest stress for workers. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them how their things can be less stressful. Also, tell the others which is the least stressful of these (and why): the boss, overtime or customers.

Role D – Customers

You think customers are the biggest stress for workers. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them how their things can be less stressful. Also, tell the others which is the least stressful of these (and why): the boss, boredom or overtime.

Speaking – Workers' Stress

Rank these with your partner. Put the biggest workers' stresses at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| • boredom | • overtime |
| • meetings | • boss |
| • no promotion | • colleagues |
| • customers | • deadlines |

Answers – True False

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a | T | b | F | c | T | d | T | e | T | f | F | g | F | h | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.