

## eViews

An interview with Brendan MacGrath.

### GLOSSARY

to mind something	to be concerned about something
hustle and bustle	busy activity
to commute	to travel back and forth to work from home
to be couped up	to be confined
homeworking	to do paid work from home
lack	absence
buddy	friend, acquaintance
warehouse	place for storage of goods
to have a chat	to have an informal talk
to tap away	to type
sortie	excursion, trip
in inverted commas	loosely speaking (lit. "... ")
set	fixed
former	earlier point mentioned (= first, but for 2 things)
latter	more recent point mentioned (= last, but for 2 things)
task driven	organised by job
car pool	sharing of transport by car
regrets	disappointments, things to be sorry about
tracksuit, fluffy slippers	very comfortable, very casual clothes
to be on call	to be ready and available to work
whereas	while
backlog build up/ accumulation (esp. of work or things to do)	
efficiency (noun)	effectiveness
efficient (adj.)	productive
to frown upon something	to disapprove of or be unhappy with something
to come out in the wash	to end up the same

### COMPREHENSION EXERCISE-Questions

1. Where does Brendan live?
2. Where is his boss?
3. Which of the following does Brendan list as advantages of working at home?
  - (a) not getting up early
  - (b) not seeing the neighbours
  - (c) not commuting
  - (d) not having to dress formally
  - (e) not having a fixed timetable/schedule
  - (f) not having to mix with colleagues
  - (g) not travelling abroad
4. What are some of the advantages of having day to day contact with colleagues?
5. What, for Brendan, is the biggest disadvantage about working from home?
6. How does he decide when to finish for the day?
7. Does he find working at home more or less stressful than working in an office?
8. Does Brendan like his boss?
9. How many days did Brendan work on his recent holiday in Ireland?
10. How many hours a day does he work on average?
11. Does he think he's more or less efficient, working at home?
12. Does he usually work at weekends? Why/why not?
13. A working weekend; he usually \_\_\_\_\_ time later on.
14. You can really turn this to your own benefit, not just the \_\_\_\_\_ also the \_\_\_\_\_ you can get.

### COMPREHENSION EXERCISE-Answers

1. A coastal village.
2. 620 kilometres.
3. (a) (c) (e)
4. The camaraderie, talk about football matches, jokes, people to talk to, discuss problems with and get advice from.
5. There is no set timetable for work and so he tends to work too much.
6. He chooses a task and stops work when it is finished.
7. Less stressful.
8. Yes.
9. Three partial days (Thursday afternoon, Friday and part of Saturday morning.)
10. Ten.
11. More efficient.
12. No, he tries to avoid working weekends because his wife doesn't like it, although sometimes he is obliged to do so before an overseas trip.
13. A working weekend; he usually compensates the time later on.
14. You can really turn this to your own benefit, not just the economic sense also the quality of life you can get.

## LESSON PLAN

1. Where do the following people usually work?

computer programmer	nurse	lawyer	chef
dentist	farmer	optician	childcare worker
plumber	salesperson	architect	baker
estate agent	teacher	policeman/woman	
journalist	firefighter	company receptionist	
systems analyst	musician	film director	jingle/copywriter

2. How many of the above could work at home, given modern technology? How many couldn't and why not? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of each?

If students have jobs, ask them if they could work at home. Why/why not? What would they consider the advantages/disadvantages? (If they don't have jobs, get them to choose one.)

3. Go through the glossary. Check meaning and pronunciation.
4. Go through the comprehension questions. Predict the answers.
5. Play the interview. Students compare their ideas from Q.2 with what Brendan says and then check the answers to the questions.  
Repeat and pause where/ if necessary.
6. In pairs, choose 5 of the jobs from Q.1 above and discuss what changes have taken place in this job over the last 25 years. Think about: whether it really existed 25 years ago, whether its name has changed (eg. childcare workers were nannies, pre-school/kindergarten teachers), the average number of working hours/ week, comparative salary, status, promotional opportunities, length of holidays, etc.
7. In pairs, students prepare a short (2 – 3 minute) talk on how they see the evolution of the working world in the next 10 years. Give them the following to start them off: jobs will be more/ less specialised, there will be more/ less mergers, there will be more/ less smaller independent companies, organigrams will become more/ less linear, the retirement age will go up/ drop, people will change jobs more/ less than now, there will be a tendency towards more/ less part-time jobs, etc.  
Record each pair. Play back and correct as a class activity.

## TRANSCRIPTION

eV Now, you work for clients all over the world. You spend a fair bit of time in airports, and yet you live in this wonderful coastal village. You work from home, you don't need to work from head office. How do you find working from home?

Brendan Working from home has many, many advantages, in my opinion. I always say cheekily, first of all that the boss... my boss is 620 kilometres away, and that's a very good distance to have between you and your boss. He won't mind too much if I say that, but no...the great advantages are that, some days I'm here at home, so I don't have to get up in the morning at seven o'clock, get into a car and drive for an hour into that traffic, all that hustle and bustle, find a parking space, etc, etc. No. My office is between my bedroom and my living room, and that's a big, big plus in terms of quality of life, no doubt about it. It takes a lot of stress out of the day. I think it would probably be one hour to go from here, to an office, which a lot of my neighbours do in fact. They commute, they do that. And also come back as well in the evening, and that's just such a relief not to have to do that. My job is good in that sense so that... ok, I'm not here in this room coupled up 8, 10 even 12 hours a day, everyday. For example last week I was in Hungary, two weeks before that I was in Israel, next week I'm going to France for a day, I've been in the U.S. this year as well, I've been in Israel also earlier on in the year, so it's a good balance I think, it's not just... I do have plenty of contact with people at the same time, that can be one of the disadvantages of homeworking. I don't have... shall we say, day to day contact with my colleagues, which maybe is something that I certainly missed at the start. When I was working in this plant in Ireland, you had this camaraderie maybe, the talk about the football matches, the jokes, the whole lot. Also you had people to talk to, to discuss your problems with.

eV How do you compensate for that lack of day to day contact with your work buddies?

Brendan I'd say over this 5 year period that I've been working here, where I've been going back to visit the same factories, the same warehouses, the same facilities, I've had the opportunity to develop quite good relationships with my contacts in these plants so... OK, clearly they're not working in the same company as me, they're doing their day to day job, their positions, etcetera, but, I do have that personal contact that friendliness, camaraderie, both working and I'd say social relationship with many people in these factories. OK it's clearly not the same as going to the coffee machine or the water fountain together, and having a chat about things, but... again I think in this job, if you're in this kind of work that I'm doing, if you have the discipline, and that's very important, if you have the discipline you can find a very good balance between the days when you're here on your own. You're working away, tapping away on reports or whatever it is, and then having these sorties, having these trips out of the office as such, in inverted commas, to go and visit my customers or contacts or... in these facilities. I mention the thing about discipline, it's very important. I'd say one of the biggest disadvantages of working at home is that there's no... Again, you don't have your 5 colleagues in your work area who also leave at 6.30, 7.00 o'clock. There's no set stop time really, and that's a disadvantage. You've got to be careful with that you don't end up working too many hours. And that's something I don't manage too well actually.

eV How do you try and do that? Do you try and pick a time and say "I'm going to finish at 6.00 or 7.00 no matter where I'm at" or do you pick a task and say "When I finish writing that report or that phone call or fax or... I'm going to finish" or... How do you work that?

Brendan Unfortunately it's not the former, it's the latter, most of the time. It's all task driven, it's all "What do I have on my desk?", "What's on my things-to-do list?" That list that never ends. That's my problem, shall we say, from a homeworking point of view, is that discipline. I think it's a very good idea, you have to say, "Stop at 6.00 or 7.00", being realistic maybe say 7.30. The people that work in this area work late, I was surprised. It

was a big culture shock for me when I came here first of all. You know in this plant in Ireland we worked from 8.30 till 5.15. That was the typical... working hours, and we would generally be out of there by quarter to six, six o'clock would be almost something extreme there. We had this car pool arrangement, we were forced to leave at the same time. Whereas here we don't have that. That was a shock for me to start to go, going to a factory at... Shock? Let's say it was a big surprise to go into a factory at 9.00 o'clock and then, not get out until 8.00 o'clock in the evening... When I look back now and have no regrets about the change I made and the kind of life I have. I think this is a great place to live and work, it gives me great possibilities for quality of life.

eV Do you think that the fact that you can get about... sit down to work in tracksuit and fluffy slippers compensates for the fact that perhaps you're always on call, or you find it very hard to stop working and disconnect and turn your attention elsewhere, whether that's to... chatting with your wife, or watching telly or listening to music or cooking dinner or going for a beer, or whatever it is you want to do. Does that compensate?

Brendan Yeah it does compensate somewhat that informality that working in your own home allows you. It does reduce stress I think, the stress that you can have in a workplace again, my boss is not here, I think I have a very good boss, I don't have the kind of boss who's... who pressurises people a lot. He's a very good team player, etcetera, whereas in this life and work in general, you can have bosses which can be quite oppressive, quite hard drivers. And so I don't have any direct contact with people like that and that's certainly a big advantage. It does compensate.

eV I read something just the other day about an Internet guy who loves his laptop, his portable computer, because he's got all this freedom. He was talking about being able to go on holidays with the kids and have a lot more quality time with his family. And he said "...and for example, I wrote this e-mail standing in queues at DisneyWorld". And to me, I thought, "That's incredibly sad". Imagine taking your family on holidays and Dad's off with his head in his laptop half the time.

Brendan I've done something like that, shall we say. This beautiful... no. Did I say beautiful? This nice piece of hardware I've got, the laptop, it gives you such mobility. I can send e-mails to people wherever... send documents. It really facilitates your work. Now at the same time I went on holidays last year. Took a break. Went home to Ireland for a few days, see my family, my five sisters, the whole lot, but I had some backlog of work reports, so fortunately or unfortunately, I took the computer with me and I spent the Thursday afternoon, the Friday and a bit of the Saturday morning, finishing off those reports, getting them out of the way. Yeah it was good, got them off my mind, was able to enjoy the rest of the two or three days that I was in Ireland, but if I didn't have that facility maybe, I might have more discipline maybe to not take on that work in the first place. Again, it's a tool, and it shouldn't become a... how should I put it. It's a tool. It's something to facilitate your work but, it's not something that should be driving you to work harder, if you understand. I think I work hard, I think I work an average 10 hours a day.

eV Do you think you produce more here or do you just think work is more enjoyable ?

Brendan I'd a Maths professor who, years ago, he was of the opinion that people in office environments I think between the morning period they're usually working around 50% efficiency, and the afternoon, you're down to about 30, 40%. I think what I'm doing here, at home, with these less distractions, I'm... I don't know... guess that I'm up around 60 or 70% efficient, focused, using my time to that extent for productive work. I think definitely that the home environment facilitates more effective work practices. In general I don't work on the weekends, I've a very good "local supervisor"... and that's my wife. She very much frowns... and I'm very glad she does this, very much frowns upon weekend work. And that's good, that's a good... how shall I put it? I've got a reminder there that I shouldn't be doing these things. There are times when it's just "I'm sorry, it's going to have to be Saturday or Sunday", whatever, or at least a couple of hours on Sunday evening, just

to prepare work for the following day or during the week, especially if I'm going on an international trip. In Israel they start work on Sundays, so, if I want to get a complete week in Israel, I have to leave here on Saturday morning. So I'm losing the weekend. I get back here then on Thursday evening, really tired, or wrecked tired as they say in Ireland. Friday then, start to work on some reports maybe. So that's a weekend that's... which is a working weekend. Yeah sure... I usually compensate the time later on, keep a track of these things and make sure that I don't... I can use these days then for taking holidays later on. So, I think it all comes out in the wash. Again I just... so many advantages about this thing, and if you have the discipline, combined with that discipline, taking all these advantages you can really... turn this to your own benefit. In many ways, not just the economic sense, also the quality of life you can get.

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