

Reading Part 4a

Read the text and the questions. Choose the correct answer for each question.

Michael de Angelis, Taxi Driver

I'm self-employed, although most of my business now comes from a software company. They have a lot of visits from foreign consultants, so I do regular trips to and from the local city airport. I love telling the consultants about the city, past and present. They usually say they've learnt interesting things, so I get good tips!

My customers must hire me in advance, and I use a smartphone for calls, email and social media. At first, I was in a radio circuit as well – I paid a fee to receive bookings from a central network. But I stopped that because I felt I was beginning to get enough regular customers through my other communication systems.

While I am driving in the city, I hate it when any car driver, taxi drivers included, leaves their engine on for a long time when they are parked. This can really affect people's health. Also, lorries delivering to shops can hold up the traffic, and of course we've got customers expecting us at a certain time.

Any taxi driver needs good interpersonal skills. But I also believe in waiting to see whether a particular customer wants to talk or not. I realise not everyone wants to. Sometimes it's me who's having a bad day, but I mustn't show it – I have to keep smiling. Also, if someone's really not being pleasant, I don't let it affect me and my driving.

Thinking about the future, I believe it's important not to stand still, but to keep your business developing. My work with the software company has been really valuable and if I could find more contracted work of that kind – just one more regular corporate customer – I'd be happy. This might mean that I have to take on an assistant to help me out, but that's not on the plans for now.

1. What does Michael say about his consultant customers?
 - a) They usually have lots of questions for him.
 - b) They tell him things about their own countries.
 - c) They are grateful for the information he gives them.
2. What does Michael say about getting customers via the radio taxi service?
 - a) He saw this as old-fashioned.
 - b) He realised he no longer needed to do this.
 - c) He found he was paying too much for this system.
3. When driving in the city, Michael can get annoyed by
 - a) drivers who add to air pollution.
 - b) taxi drivers who don't respect traffic signs.
 - c) lorry drivers who chat to each other in their vehicles.
4. In the fourth paragraph, Michael says he
 - a) tries to appear cheerful to customers.
 - b) refuses to take customers if necessary.
 - c) will always politely chat to customers.
5. In the next few months, Michael intends to
 - a) start employing another driver.
 - b) develop another business.
 - c) find another big client.

Reading Part 4b

Read the text and the questions. Choose the correct answer for each question.

The four-day working week

When academics, businesspeople and politicians discuss the future of work, the four-day working week is frequently mentioned. Supporters of the idea insist it's a natural consequence of a jobs market that now sees more and more people describing themselves as being self-employed and able to choose their own working hours. But a more negative view of the same argument is – if the predictions of some economists are to be believed – that millions of jobs are at risk in the age of robots.

But is this really progress? In a UK radio documentary, professor of history Emma Griffin looked back to an age before the great Industrial Revolution changed western society in the mid-18th century. Work-life balance was the last thing workers wanted, and the five- or even six-day working week was a great new thing.

"Before the Industrial Revolution most of the UK population was made up of agricultural workers doing 'piecework' – what we might now call being self-employed," Griffin explains. "They were tied to the seasons; in the winter there wasn't enough for them to do." It is easy to get nostalgic about this pre-industrial past, but in fact people were, in Griffin's words, "often miserably, mind-numbingly poor". And so they rushed to take up the regular, year-round hours that the new factories offered, seeing it as a kind of liberation.

And so began 'the working week'. It started off, though, as six days long, usually filled by 14-hour shifts in the factories and mines. The effect was what another expert, David Rooney, describes as 'the standardisation of the population'. However, before long, he explains, such 'social control' felt less like liberating people and more like exploiting them. At least trade unions forced factory bosses to concede an extra half day on Saturdays.

More concessions followed, leading to workers being given the whole of Saturday off in the early 20th century. Now, however, the 5-day week is under threat. Some experts are even predicting a 21-hour working week that will completely reshape our lives. But Professor Griffin is concerned: "The jobs we currently have will be shared amongst more people. There will be more jobs available, and more time for leisure. But there will also be less pay, and therefore less to spend on leisure."

1. In the first paragraph, the writer says that the four-day week
 - a) goes with current thinking on job flexibility.
 - b) is a popular idea among one group of experts.
 - c) remains far off despite being much discussed.
2. In the second paragraph, the writer questions whether
 - a) relevant conclusions can be drawn from a historical view.
 - b) giving people less work really represents a step forward.
 - c) previous attempts to change the working week were sensible.
3. In Emma Griffin's view, the situation for pre-18th century farm workers
 - a) had one similarity with the present day.
 - b) was better than that of workers in the first factories.
 - c) may not have been as bad as some historians have claimed.
4. David Rooney makes the point that the six-day working week
 - a) only applied to certain industries.
 - b) was balanced by short working days.
 - c) led to employers taking advantage of workers.
5. Emma Griffin says that a big reduction in working hours will not
 - a) make workers any happier.
 - b) solve the problem of unemployment.
 - c) lead to increased wealth.

Reading Part 4c

Read the text and the questions. Choose the correct answer for each question.

Distraction at work: a psychological view

If your work, like mine, depends on finding undisturbed time for deep focus and creative thinking, you'll be familiar with distraction. But most people misunderstand what distraction really is – and clearing up that confusion is an essential first step to any lasting solution. Instinctively, we divide sources of distraction into two categories. First, temptations: when you're grappling with a tough creative challenge, wandering over to social media can seem irresistibly alluring. Then, interruptions: co-workers asking questions, emails popping up, or the construction site near my home office where workers compete, so far as I can tell, to hit pieces of metal with hammers as loudly as they possibly can. However, when we think in terms of temptations and interruptions, we're defining the problem as coming from the outside – and we try to shut them out with website blockers or noise-cancelling headphones. But there's a reason such methods never work very well. The real culprit isn't external irritations, but rather an internal urge to be distracted, to avoid focusing on what matters most.

Nobody diagnosed this problem as brilliantly as Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th-century German philosopher who argued that we seek out distractions in order to stay mentally busy, so we can avoid facing up to the big questions – like whether we're living genuinely meaningful lives. We tweet and click away because "when we are alone and quiet, we fear that something will be whispered into our ear." Worse still, even work that feels productive can really be a form of distraction, if it keeps us from addressing what's most important. "...we labour at our daily work more ardently and thoughtlessly than is necessary," Nietzsche wrote.

Another explanation, underscored by psychological research, is that we're desperate for a sense of autonomy, of being in charge. Consequently, we rail against anything we feel we've been ordered to do – even if it's ourselves who gave that order. And so you decide in advance to spend Wednesday morning on your business plan, but when Wednesday comes, you rise up against the taskmaster who gave that command, and start scrolling through Snapchat instead. Congratulations, you're a rebel – but unfortunately it's your own goals you're undermining.

Happily, when you see distraction for what it really is, you're much better equipped to fight it. All the same, watch out for the inner urge, and when it arises, don't try to squash it. Just sit with it, breathe, and let it dissipate. Remember, too, that you don't need to 'feel up for it today' in order to do important work. Instead, let yourself feel like you'd rather be doing something else, and at the same time, do the work: Open the laptop, make the phone call, type another sentence.

1. When mentioning construction site workers, the writer is
 - a) aware that he's contradicting himself.
 - b) making a key point in his argument.
 - c) bringing in his own personal frustration.
2. In the writer's view, recognising that there are different types of distraction
 - a) is how a psychologist would begin finding a solution.
 - b) is not a particularly helpful way of looking at the problem.
 - c) is necessary in order to establish a fundamental distinction.
3. In quoting Nietzsche, the writer draws our attention to the fact that
 - a) useful work is preferable to trivial actions.
 - b) taking refuge in our work is in itself a form of distraction.
 - c) distractions serve a useful purpose in stopping us from worrying.
4. In the third paragraph, the writer argues that
 - a) our behaviour when seeking distraction can be self-defeating.
 - b) distraction occurs when we have nothing to struggle for.
 - c) the self-employed are particularly prone to getting distracted.
5. In the fourth paragraph, the writer suggests that
 - a) it makes no sense to link distraction with a lack of motivation.
 - b) conscious strategies to prevent distraction usually fail.
 - c) even people who understand distraction well still get distracted.