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**Living in topsy-turvy tech time: The global economy never rests, nor do the driven – some say crazy – workers of Silicon Valley**

**ByCarolyn Zinko, San Francisco Chronicle Staff Writer  
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Silicon Valley tech workers already have bragging rights when it comes to their workload -- they put in longer hours and take fewer vacation days than people in many other fields.

Now, they're boasting about conditions that are getting worse: having to be available to work with clients in all time zones, all the time.

"The joke I've heard is, 'Going global means I never sleep,' " said Maureen Goode, a program manager at Agilent Technologies in Palo Alto.

On a recent weekday, her first meeting started at 5 a.m., with clients in Germany (where it was 2 p.m.) and in China (where it was 8 p.m.). To plan the conference call, she relied on one of her favorite Internet bookmarks, World Clock Meeting Planner, [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com) which produces charts useful for detailing the best and worst times for teleconferences in multiple time zones.

Goode's work is conducted in the garage – where she, like many of her co-workers, has moved her office to avoid waking her husband and kids.

"You have to interact with manufacturing sites, sales offices and service centers in places like India, which has a 12 1/2-hour time difference from California," she said. "It means I'm not calling them during traditional working hours."

Valerie Frederickson, a Menlo Park management consultant, also feels pressure to perform day and night. At 10:30 on a recent weeknight, she was finishing a client report, having juggled her schedule to meet with her gardener earlier that evening.

"While I was on the computer, an e-mail came from the client, who was in Minneapolis, asking where the report was," she said. "I was appalled that at 12:30 a.m. their time, they're worrying about reports and sending e-mails. They should have been in bed."

Jean Hollands, who founded the Growth and Leadership Center, a corporate psychology and executive coaching institute in Mountain View, 22 years ago, said it's not uncommon for salespeople to be up at midnight making calls to Hong Kong (15 hours ahead) and again at 6 a.m. to Basel, Switzerland (nine hours ahead), every day, for months on end.

"In all my years in this practice, I've never seen a more depressed employee base than now," said Holland.

Downsizing has forced many workers to assume more responsibilities, and some are afraid to set limits on their duties and availability for fear of falling behind or being let go. Others don't take their full vacation time, for similar reasons.

Richard Stiller, a former human resources executive who has worked at 15 South Bay companies in the past 25 years, including Pacific Telesis, Atari, Electronic Arts, Borland Software and Sun Microsystems Inc., said it is not unusual to see workers accrue four weeks' time off without using it, because they didn't want to miss work.

Short of forcing employees to take time off, companies offer to buy out vacation time or simply put a cap on it. "People would say, 'I've stopped accruing vacation!' and I'd say, 'No, you've topped off,' " he recalled. "Not taking it is almost a badge of honor in some quarters."

With the U.S. economy globalizing at a rapid clip, far-flung emerging markets are where the growth is, at least for the next decade, said John Challenger, chief executive officer of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, a nationally recognized outplacement firm in Chicago. Coupled with the decreasing costs of teleconferencing and videoconferencing, workers can expect to be tapped for meetings almost any time the company deems it important or convenient.

"It's not just a Monday-to-Friday workweek, it's Saturday and Sunday as well," Challenger said. "The boundary between your personal life and your working life has not just blurred, it has disappeared."

But even as technology is making 24/7 availability easier with all manner of communications gadgets, employees are playing a role, too. Many buy into the culture and lore of Silicon Valley, thanks to examples of engineers and programmers who toiled and made it big, such as Oracle Corp.'s Larry Ellison and Apple Computer Inc.'s Steve Jobs.

Although management consultants say putting in extremely long hours is not a function of pay, Silicon Valley employees earn up to 40 percent more than workers in similar jobs in other cities across the nation. Two factors pushing salaries upward are the competitive nature of the industry and the high cost of living in the Bay Area, said James Holland, a Silicon Valley management consultant. In the valley, a program manager with an engineering or science degree running a design operation overseas can earn \$110,000 to \$140,000 a year, while a vice president of sales at a small software firm can earn \$140,000, supplemented by sales incentives or commission that can boost the year-end salary to \$250,000 on the high end, he said.

Stiller, the former human resources executive, who made out well during an IPO at one of the companies he worked for, decided to become a consultant in 2002, partly to cut back on his hours. But recently, he did a stint as an interim vice president of human resources at Silicon Image and quickly found himself sliding back into old patterns, working 11 hours a day.

"Nobody was saying I had to, but it was the pace," he said. "The train is moving 100 mph, and you have a choice: Ride on it or get off."

Not all believe that such hours are necessary for success. According to "Overwork in America: When the Way We Work Becomes Too Much," a 2004 study of 1,000 Americans by the Families and Work Institute in New York, "the very skills that are fundamental to succeeding in this global economy – specifically moving quickly from task to task with little time for recovery in between, facing many interruptions, and

working outside normal work hours, including vacations – can be useful but also can become detrimental. For a significant group of Americans, the way we work today appears to be negatively affecting their health and effectiveness at work."

The survey found that overworked Americans who are forced to multitask, work with frequent interruptions and devote energy to low-value work such as setting up meetings to plan future meetings, were more likely to make mistakes and were angry at their employers for expecting them to do so much. The study also found that workers who put an equal or higher priority on family than work are less likely to be overworked than employees who put work first.

Psychologist Ofer Zur, whose practice in Sonoma includes employees in the high-tech industry, said some people work 16 hours a day because they don't know how to shift gears.

"The problem is not the Germany-Japan conference call, but whether you balance it with time paying attention to your dog, your husband, your children, yourself," he said.

When his clients take business calls or send text messages in the middle of a therapy session, he invites them to contemplate how they want to live their lives, when it's appropriate to multitask and when it's appropriate to pay attention.

"This kind of addiction of availability is about more than work – it's a franticness that is hard to shut off," he said. "It creates the illusion of being alive. But a lot of it is pedaling to nowhere."

Not all Silicon Valley workers organize their lives the way Goode, married and a mother of three, does. When she puts in crazy hours one day, she tries to ease off later in the week. Ditto for Frederickson, who does not share the attitude of friends, who quip, rather morbidly, "I'll sleep when I'm dead."