

TimeOut | **Media****Big in Japan** by Mark Schreiber

Pandemic spurs workers to engage in moonlighting

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An oft-cited passage from the Gospel of Matthew (6:24) goes: "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

It's easy to see why. Serving two masters can easily create a conflict of interest, particularly in the case of staff with knowledge of the inner workings of their employer.

Not so long ago Japan's lifetime employment and other paternalistic practices demanded a worker's complete loyalty, and moonlighting (referred to in Japanese as *fukugyō* or, literally, supplemental or secondary work) was discouraged or banned outright, a situation that remains in force for government workers and certain parts of the private sector.

That's not to say that the system was completely inflexible, but a salaried worker had to have a compelling reason for working outside their regular job, such as helping out in the family business, particularly in the case of farming households, or to supplement their income to meet a short-term need, such as getting out of debt.

Since the collapse of the economic bubble of the early 1990s and accompanying decline in traditional employment practices, more workers have justified moonlighting as a stepping stone to a different career, which enabled them to first test their aptitude in another occupation before taking the plunge.

Generally speaking, however, moonlighting had a somewhat less than respectable image.

On rare occasions the tabloids have gleefully reported on some of the more extreme examples, such as nurses, school teachers, policewomen or servicewomen in the Self-Defense Forces taking jobs in the sex industry.

Spa (Nov. 3) reported that while more workers have been taking outside jobs to

address market supply and demand, the pandemic has drastically changed the situation and many companies are now giving their blessings, or at least tacit approval.

And, in some cases, companies are even placing their staff in other jobs. (In July, the media reported that outlets of Tsukada Nojo, a nationwide *izakaya* pub chain, continued to pay furloughed staff 60% of their regular salary while they voluntarily went to moonlight in temporary jobs in supermarkets and other businesses.)

Even workers in their 50s or 60s facing compulsory retirement are said to benefit from the wider acceptance, since a part-time job might help them to prepare for a second career with minimal interruption.

While government jobs appeal to those seeking stable employment, it is a mistake to regard them as completely secure. Masaki Shimada, a self-described "civil servant portfolio worker" who carries two different business cards, discusses the "safe" way to work in a second job.

"It's acceptable for regional government employees to take jobs with NPOs or regional promotional organizations that involve some form of societal benefit," says Shimada, who in principle ruled out work for profit-making businesses that would compromise their trust.

He justifies taking an outside job, since it "enables one to acquire technology or knowledge, or develop personal contacts or non-remunerative assets that one could not obtain from one's regular position."

Meanwhile, Shukan Post (Nov. 6-13) looked at the increasing desperation of airline cabin attendants, who have fallen on difficult times due to the pandemic.

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"Our bonus last summer was cut by two-thirds, and will drop to zero this winter," one cabin attendant in her 30s told the magazine. "Since my home mortgage has a provision for boosted payments at the time of the two annual bonuses, it's become a major headache. I've used the company credit union to borrow ¥1 million, but it looks like I'll have to moonlight for a while."

Last April, Jetstar Japan, a low-cost carrier affiliated with Australia's Qantas airlines, gave employees the green light to seek outside employment. Some of those with certification as a childminder have started working at nursery schools.

A spokesperson for Japan Airlines tells Shukan Post the company permits employees to take on outside jobs as long as it doesn't interfere with their main work.

"Some have taken jobs at rest homes or nurseries, which pay them directly," he is quoted as saying.

All Nippon Airways, however, has adopted a stricter position.

"Advance permission must first be obtained from three managers, so the hurdles are high," a spokesperson says. "Work schedules for any given month are not notified until the 26th of the previous month, and there are also many cases where they are on standby, so it's difficult for them to take jobs for another company."

"Traditionally — and, in some cases, even now — a company's rules of employment treated *fukugyō* as grounds for dis-

Mizuho Bank's four- or three-day working week gives staff more time to spend on other pursuits, including a second job. KYODO

missal, or initially strict punishment," says Tom Nevins, founder and chief consultant at TMT, a labor consulting company. He added that in the past some companies required an employee to obtain permission and provide the name of the secondary employer.

"However, former Prime Minister (Shinzo) Abe himself encouraged companies to consider allowing moonlighting, and now it's much less likely to see strong action taken against employees," Nevins says, while pointing out that with the increase in term contract and part-time employment (about half of Japan's workforce), "holding multiple jobs has become much more common."

Even banks, which were always among the sticklers for strict working rules, have been changing their working conditions. Nevins highlights Mizuho Bank as being one of the most striking examples.

"The bank gives staff the option to work four days a week with a 20% pay cut, or three days a week with a 40% pay cut," Nevins says. "So Mizuho allows its employees to take side jobs, and it appears quite a few of them are going for these options."

Big in Japan is a weekly column that focuses on issues being discussed by domestic media organizations.