

4 reasons why Devina Mehra thinks 90-hour work week idea is 'bunkum'

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Devina Mehra, founder of First Global, criticised the push for long working hours, challenging the belief that increased hours lead to higher productivity. Her remarks followed comments from L&T's SN Subrahmanyan advocating Sunday work, addressing issues like work culture and gender equality.



Devina Mehra, MD and chairperson, First Global

Devina Mehra, the founder of First Global, offered a strong critique of the idea of working long hours, such as 90 hours a week, saying in a social media post, "This type of recommendation of working for 'nation-building' or 'company building' is bunkum."

Her comments came following a statement by Larsen and Toubro (L&T) top boss SN Subrahmanyan, who was seen advocating working on Sundays. Defending the comment, [L&T released a statement](#) highlighting its focus on 'nation-building' and explained that Subrahmanyan's comments reflect their goal of achieving exceptional results.

Devina Mehra challenged the common notion that working more hours equates to higher productivity and greater contribution to the economy. In a post on the social media platform X, Mehra shared arguments delving into several important areas, like productivity, work culture, gender equality, and the broader social implications of such work expectations.

<https://tinyurl.com/yr3hvp6p>



Here's a look at the four key arguments presented by the ace stock market investor:

1. The Myth of Increased Productivity with Longer Hours

One of Mehra's main arguments is that research shows productivity drops significantly when work hours go beyond a certain limit, along with the negative impact it has on mental and physical health.

She referred to her own experience of working at Citibank, where long work hours were prevalent.

“Anecdotally, I remember from my days in Citibank which had a late working culture (barring exceptions like Aditya Puri who left at 5:30 sharp 😊), many officers would while away time, say from 3-6 p.m., and then get back to work again to show their bosses that they were at the desks till 8:30 or 9,” her post on X read.

She emphasised that real productivity is not measured by hours spent in the office but by the actual output produced.

2. Work Culture and Family Life: Impact on Women

Mehra's next argument is based on the gender impact of a long work culture. She said, "This type of working hours recommendation assumes that the man (it is almost always the man) who is working around the clock while his wife is taking care of the home and children."

Mehra reflects on the story of Narayan Murthy and Sudha Murthy, noting that Mr Murthy's intense dedication to his business led him to outsource parenting not only to his wife but also to Sudha Murthy's sister and parents. She pointed out that this resulted in his children feeling that their father loved the company more than them. The book she refers to is *An Uncommon Love* by Chitra Banerjee Devakurni.

Imposing a 90-hour work week would likely preclude many women from fully participating in the workforce, or worse, forcing them to choose between their career and their family, Mehra highlighted.

3. The Importance of Women in Nation Building

Mehra goes on to point out that no country has successfully transitioned from a low-income to a middle-income economy without substantial participation from women in the workforce.

"So, if the aim is to build the country and its economy, we need to attract more women to the workforce, not less," she said backing her argument against the 90-hour workweek.

4. Lessons from Japan & Korea: Social Fallout

Mehra highlighted the social consequences of a culture that demands long working hours. Taking the examples of Japan and South Korea, where long office hours were normalised, she pointed out the alarming decline in birth rates in these countries. As a result of overwork, many women in the countries have opted not to marry or have children, resulting in birth rates in these countries plummeting to far below replacement levels.

Final Word: Focus on Skilling Up

Lastly, Mehra said that while she doesn't believe in the idea of working for long hours in the office, she is an advocate of putting in long hours for self-development and skilling up. "... the fact is that if you want to really be skilled in something like equity research or any other real knowledge area you need to put in those 10000 hours of work to really learn the skill," Mehra said.

She advised putting in long hours in the initial years on learning and not in the office.