An employee is a person who is willing to give up responsibility for his actions in return for a wage, and a person is an employee to the extent to which this is the case. The Nuremburg defense—"I was just following orders"—is the anthem and alibi of the employee. Put this way, the willingness to be an employee—to be, if you will, a mercenary—lies at the root of many of the troubles plaguing our species.

Volunteers, by contrast, act on their own judgment and take responsibility for their decisions. Volunteers, too, have done horrible things—but not nearly so many horrible things. You can reason with a person who is acting for herself; she acknowledges that she is accountable for her own decisions. Employees, on the other hand, will do the most unimaginably dumb and destructive things while stubbornly refusing to think about their actions at all.

Whenever you can, refuse to be an employee—use your time, energy, and talents to do what you see fit, rather than to serve others as a mercenary. When you must, work for a wage to survive—but don't think yourself absolved of responsibility for your actions, don't obey unconscionable orders, don't lose your individuality in the ocean of competition and protocol.

IF YOU DON'T STEAL FROM YOUR BOSS YOU'RE STEALING FROM YOUR FAMILY

April 15 is Steal Something from Work Day

Employees keep this country working. They crowd into offices and factories every morning. They pave over fields, and park their cars on that pavement. They convert forests into junk mail, and deliver that junk mail. They build strip malls and gas stations, and operate cash registers in them by the listless million. They dump toxic waste into rivers, lakes, and oceans; they stoke the fires that fill the sky with pollution. Employees are destroying the ozone layer. Employees are driving species after species into extinction. Employees slaughter cows and perform medical experiments on monkeys. Employees throw away truckloads of food rather than share with the hungry. Employees drive homeless people out of heated buildings into the snow. They watch your every move through security cameras. They evict you when you don't pay your rent. They imprison you when you don't pay your taxes. They publicly humiliate you when you don't do your homework or make it to work on time. They disinterestedly enter information about your private life into credit reports and FBI files. They give you parking tickets and speeding tickets. They administer standardized exams, reform schools, and lethal injections. The soldiers that herded people into gas chambers were employees, as are the soldiers currently occupying Iraq and Afghanistan, as are the suicide bombers who target them—they are employees of God, if you will, hoping to be paid in paradise.