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Personal Finance

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Jeff Bezos is having a busy day.

The online retail giant's site crashed Monday as shoppers logged on to shop for discounted merchandise on Amazon Prime Day. Bezos, Amazon's founder and chief executive, was declared the world's richest person of the modern era with a fortune of \$150 billion.

And Independent Senator Bernie Sanders sent Bezos a stinging message on Twitter:

"I stand with the Amazon workers fighting for decent working conditions and a living wage on #PrimeDay," the former candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination wrote. "While Jeff Bezos' wealth increases by \$275 million a day, Amazon workers are afraid to take bathroom breaks at work and are grossly underpaid."

The typical Amazon worker made less than \$30,000 in 2017. Amazon has said that figure takes into account its global workforce of 560,000 people at all levels and said the average hourly wage for a full-time associate in its fulfillment centers, including cash, stock, and incentive bonuses, is over \$15 per hour before overtime.

Bezos, meanwhile, has so much money he doesn't know what to do with it—and he didn't get there by separating his work and home life. There does not necessarily need to be a strict line between work life and home life in order to be successful, he said at an event earlier this year hosted by publisher Axel Springer. He said home life and work life are, in fact, linked.

"This work-life harmony thing is what I try to teach young employees and actually senior executives at Amazon too. But especially the people coming in," Bezos said. "I get asked about work-life balance all the time. And my view is, that's a debilitating phrase because it implies there's a strict trade-off."

Also see: What NOT to buy on Amazon Prime Day

"And the reality is, if I am happy at home, I come into the office with tremendous energy," he said. "And if I am happy at work, I come home with tremendous energy. It actually is a circle; it's not a balance. And I think that is worth everybody paying attention to it."

"You never want to be that guy—and we all have a coworker who's that person—who as soon as they come into a meeting they drain all the energy out of the room," Bezos added, according to this transcript. "You can just feel the energy go whoosh! You don't want to be that guy."

Such work-life harmony does not extend to the company's warehouse employees, labor advocates claim, and the issue raises its head every Amazon Prime Day. A U.K. investigator recently said many employees were forced to relieve themselves in bottles during 10-hour shifts, because they're afraid of being disciplined for taking bathroom breaks.

A spokeswoman from Amazon told MarketWatch at the time that it ensures all of its associates have "easy access to toilet facilities" and that toilet breaks are not monitored. (Amazon did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the tweet by Bernie Sanders or the issues with the website.)

"Amazon provides a safe and positive workplace for thousands of people with competitive pay and benefits from day one," the spokeswoman said. "We are committed to treating every one of our associates with dignity and respect. We don't recognize these allegations as an accurate portrayal of activities in our buildings."

Bezos has previously responded to criticisms of Amazon's reported grueling corporate work culture—from warehouse workers to white-collar workers—saying such reports are "isolated anecdotes."

Americans, meanwhile, struggle to find happiness at work. More than half of U.S. employees were not engaged at work between 2010 and 2012 according to Gallup's recent State of the American Workplace report, which collected data from more than 195,000 employees.


That's bad news for the employer's bottom line: People who are happier at work are 12% more productive, according to an experiment of 700 people conducted by the Social Market Foundation and the University of Warwick's Centre for Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy.

Many businesses are trying to increase flexibility in the workplace to facilitate a balance with home life and it's increasingly regarded as a perk job applicants look out for, said Kareem Bakr, director at Selby Jennings global recruitment organization focused on the financial services industry.

"More and more companies are realizing that the easiest way to better sell against the competition and attract people to their business is not by throwing more money in offer letters, but to make sure their work culture is not one that burns their employees out," Bakr said.

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