

Kaos Studios and Quality of Life in the Game Industry

There has been recent news coverage concerning the “crunch” that developers at THQ’s Kaos Studios are currently enduring while they finish work on Homefront. The IGDA’s stance on this is very clear. We know, as has been well documented, that extensive overtime is not only ineffective from the point of view of productivity, but moreover it is destructive of employee morale. Studios engaging in excessive overtime injure the reputation of the entire game industry, preventing top talent from entering and remaining in game development, and harming the goodwill of other studios that work rigorously to ensure Quality of Life for their developers.

During the past week we have been speaking with representatives at THQ about this, looking to see what can be done, and how we can help prevent this from happening in the future. Our hope is to help everyone understand the series of decisions and actions that leads to end of project crunches and through that help everyone, from management down to developers, to avoid these mistakes in the future.

Our conversations with THQ have been positive and are ongoing. For now they have asked us to pass along this statement:

As with all other entertainment businesses, the craft of making videogames is largely dependent upon deadlines and production schedules. As a result, some “crunch” time as a title approaches its launch date is often inevitable within the industry, and this holds especially true for top-tier, AAA games like Homefront. However, THQ is committed to working hand-in-hand with our teams throughout the entire development cycle to manage schedules and formulate clear expectations so that as a launch date approaches we can minimize overtime and maintain a good quality of life for our team. Making games is fun—and we always want it to feel that way for our incredibly talented pool of artists and developers—so we strive to create an energetic, familial day-to-day work environment that keeps our team happy, inspired and invested, even in the face of the stress and hard work associated with an approaching deadline.

As we are all aware, Quality of Life has long been one of the most controversial and challenging aspects of life as a game developer. Many people have different views on what constitutes good Quality of Life or bad Quality of Life and how companies should treat their workers. The IGDA has been at the forefront of many of these issues and it is part of our mission to work to improve Quality of Life for developers.

In 2004 we published a 90 page white paper outlining Quality of Life in the game industry (linked to <http://www.igda.org/quality-life-white-paper-info> (<http://www.igda.org/quality-life-white-paper-info>)). This paper not only gave a state of the industry but it also made best practices recommendations for studios to help alleviate stress and allow for a more balanced life.

Since the publishing of that paper we continued to work to further promote good Quality of Life in the game industry.

In 2009 the [IGDA adopted a Code of Ethics \(http://www.igda.org/about/\)](http://www.igda.org/about/) to address this and other professional concerns. We assert as an organization that this standard of ethical behavior is critical for the development, health, and happiness to which all game developers aspire.

To achieve a greater standard of working practice, the IGDA emphasizes education and communication as core pillars of professional growth and maturity. Developers that communicate arrive on saner and more efficient practices that ensure healthier developers and better games. The health and professional growth of game developers will always be of the highest concern to the IGDA.

Toward the pursuit of safe and sane working practices, the IGDA:

- ⊙ Emphasizes leadership training and effective management;
- ⊙ Regularly surveys developers to ascertain average industry health and well-being;
- ⊙ Encourages individuals to know their legal rights in their regions;
- ⊙ Promotes communication and information exchange between developers;
- ⊙ Supports developers and studios in their pursuit of effective working practices.

Unfortunately Quality of Life is not a resolved issue, and it is something that we are continuously working to improve for all game developers. Our role thus far has primarily been in the form of education and awareness. We believe that when everyone from management down is educated and aware of the impact poor Quality of Life has they will make the choices that are in everyone's best interest.

While education and awareness are important, what else would you like to see the IGDA do? How would you like to see us approach this issue and try to effect this change in our industry? Let us know in the comments below or email me at [brian – at – igda.org](mailto:brian-at-igda.org).

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