

QUIT should i Quit

5 STEPS TO DISCOVER WORK YOU ARE MEANT TO DO
&
LIVE YOUR PURPOSE

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PART 1

REDEFINING WORK

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LIVE TO WORK. WORK TO LIVE.

“Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm – this path is easily followed most of the time.”

Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus

A TYPICAL LIFE OF THE 9-TO-5

Most of us can probably relate to this: We wake up early to work, get ready, commute, arrive at work, do our work (or pretend to do our work), then come home feeling drained. We decompress from work with some Netflix, a few drinks, get our salary at the end of the month, reward ourselves with expensive food, treat ourselves to that new handbag (because we deserve it) and repeat it all over again the next day or the next month. It’s about surviving through weekdays, only to

live on the weekends. Some people don't mind the 9-to-5 work life, while others see it as an infringement on their freedom.

There probably comes a time when we ask ourselves, "Is this it?". We feel like something is missing. But because we are so busy with work, we don't even have the time to sit back and ponder upon this question. We go through life on autopilot, feeling numb through morning traffic, sleepwalking through work, dreading the day, and not feeling alive.

Anyone can relate? I certainly can.

We tell ourselves that we work to make a *living*. But are we, really?

Or are we actually making a *dying*?

Vicki Robin illustrates this scenario accurately in her book *Your Money or Your Life: 9 Steps to Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence*¹:

"Earning a living was a means to an end, the means was earning and the end was living. But over time, our relationship with money: earning it, spending it, investing it, owning it, protecting it, worrying about it has taken over the major parts of our lives. Most of us say what we value most is our time with loved ones: family, partners, community, and yet a huge portion of our time and life is spent on our job."

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The dreams we had of finding meaning and fulfilment through our jobs have faded into the reality of professional politics, burnout, boredom, and intense competition. That sense of wonder we had as children, that sense of mission we had in college, those times when love connected our hearts to all beings great and small are forgotten — all filed under ‘We were so young’.

Along with racism and sexism, our society has a hidden hierarchy based on what you do for money. That’s called job-ism, and it pervades our interactions with one another on the job, in social settings, and even at home.”

We have gone so far as to attach our identity – who we are – to the work that we do. And when that is being stripped away from us – whether due to a job loss or career switch – it feels like we lose a huge part of ourselves. We don’t recognise who we are anymore.

We have been conditioned to think of work as drudgery, a chore you endure in exchange for a paycheck. We tell ourselves, “Work is work. You go there, do your work, then come home and find your life elsewhere. It’s something to withstand, not something that nourishes you”.

Just suck it up, right?

In fact, we boast about who suffers the most, about being busier than others, and we wear it like a badge of honour. We compete and compare as we work our way through the rat race game. Everyone else is going through the same thing (albeit not admitting it), so we think this is ‘normal’. This is how it has always been, and will ever be.

Between 2011 and 2012, the polling company Gallup did a study on millions of workers across 142 countries and revealed that more than half of them were not engaged in their work. Below were the results²:

13% engaged in their jobs

Enthusiastic and committed to their work.

63% not engaged

Sleepwalking through workday, putting time but not energy or passion into their work.

24% actively disengaged

They aren't just unhappy about their work, but they're busy acting out their unhappiness.

And this has sparked ‘quiet quitting’, a trend whereby employees are doing the bare minimum, and not going ‘above and beyond’ at work³.

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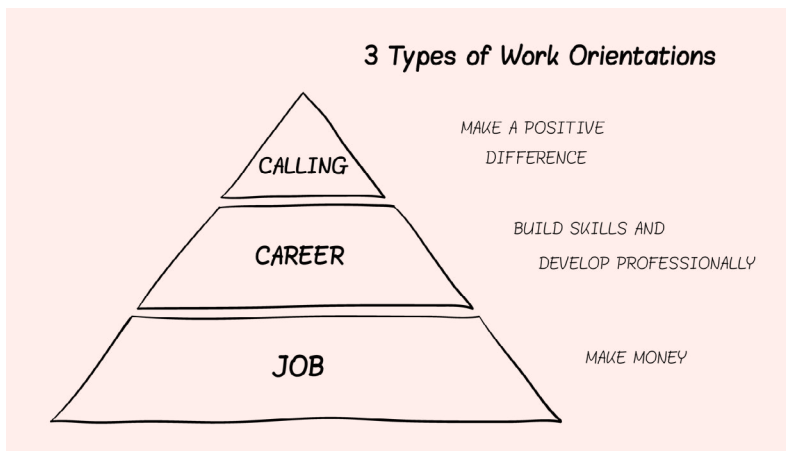
A quote by Henry David Thoreau in his book *Walden* seems to reflect this unfortunate travesty: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation”.

But what if there is another way to view ‘work’?

JOB VS CAREER

When we talk about work, we normally think about our jobs or careers.

In fact, the words ‘job’ and ‘career’ are usually used interchangeably and get thrown around rather carelessly. But it is important to identify the distinctions so that we know which category we are in (Figure 1):



(Figure 1): 3 Types of Work Orientations

Dr. Amy Wrzesniewski, a professor at Yale School of Management, has spent her career researching how individuals identify with their work⁴.

According to her, a ‘job’ is what pays the bills. Etymologists speculate that the idea of a job first came about in the mid-seventeenth century, referring to a piece of work or task that’s completed in exchange for compensation. Now, a job is what provides you with pay, benefits and perhaps some social perks. If you no longer see your work as a place to learn, gain experience or increase your connections, it could be a sign that you have a ‘job’ orientation towards your work.

While a job is something you do for others, a ‘career’, on the other hand, is something you do for yourself. A career gives you upward mobility. It allows you to hone your professional skills, grow and advance further along the career ladder – whether it is by seeking out the next promotion, or a raise in monthly paycheck. But what most people don’t know is that the word ‘career’ actually comes from the French word *carrière*, denoting a racetrack⁵, which seems fitting for many of us. Our careers actually do make us feel like we are on a hamster wheel, as we anxiously climb the corporate ladder, only to realise it’s leaning against the wrong wall.

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BUT WORK IS MORE THAN A JOB OR CAREER

While a job or a career does have its place (after all, we have bills to pay and bellies to feed), what we should be striving for instead is a ‘vocation’, or a ‘calling’. The word vocation comes from the Latin root word *vocare*, which means ‘to call’⁶. It was originally used in a religious sense, as in a call to priesthood. And for centuries, people thought of it as just that – something reserved for an elite group of people, for those special few who were lucky enough to be called.

But what if that isn’t true? What if a calling is something everyone has?

A calling is not some mystical voice high up in the sky, proclaiming to you your life’s prophecy. It is also more than a career or a job; it’s the purpose and direction of your life. This means that it doesn’t just apply to what you do; it’s who you are. It is what gets you out of bed in the morning. It is your reason for doing what you do – your *raison d’être*. A calling happens when you feel a deep alignment between the work you do, and who you are as a person.

You feel a personal and emotional connection to your work. As a result, you are enthusiastic, have a sense of purpose and are willing to work harder and longer to make a contribution.

REDEFINING WORK

“Work is love made visible.”

Kahlil Gibran

According to the Oxford Languages, ‘work’ is defined as “activity involving mental or physical effort in order to achieve a purpose or a result”. This means, work is whatever you invest your time, energy, attention and resources into.

With this definition, work then includes your health and fitness, your relationships, parenting, personal growth, spirituality, character and leisure, because all these take a lot of work. Your life consists of many different domains of work. Your whole life, then, is your work.

You are your work.

You are not a sectioned being, with one slice of work over here, balanced out with one slice of personal life over there. Instead, you are a whole being, unified. You are a category of one.

Each of us is more than our job or chosen profession. People are not robots, programmed to do one thing. You are full-spectrum and multifaceted creature with many varied interests. Although we may like to believe we were born to do just one thing, or perhaps we’re comfortable with only having one career, the reality is, most of us are hardwired

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for a handful of activities. Most people have one ‘calling’ or ‘vocation’, but expressed in a variety of ways over a variety of platforms – each supporting and intertwining with the others in interesting and powerful ways.

Long gone are the days of graduating from high school or college, joining up with a company and working there for forty years before retiring and collecting a pension. At some point, you must come to grips with the fact that you will do many different things in life. Jobs will come and go, and our careers may change. But in all those experiences, we will evolve. And as we evolve, so does our life’s purpose and the way we express them.

We should see our entire lives as a work of art – like a symphony. And every aspect of it is represented by the notes, melodies and chords that make up the whole masterpiece.

Hence, our task each day is to always align every part of our lives with that symphony, which is: The highest, truest expression of ourselves as a human being.

And it doesn’t mean it has to be full of pain, dread and suffering. Challenges are inevitable, but if we can start to think of work the same way we think of play, treating it as something we do for pleasure, it could change the world. In essence, the same attitude we have toward the pursuits we enjoy doing, we should also have towards work. This goes on to say that work is not a means to an end. *It is the end.*

WORK ORIENTATION EXERCISE

Which work orientation do you have – a job, career or calling?

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. What is the most meaningful part of my job?

2. Do I end my workday feeling emotionally satisfied?

3. Would I be in this position if I didn't need the paycheck?

4. Do I want to rise to the top of my chosen career path or am I happy where I am?

5. What are the 3 main lessons I have learned from my current work (*for example: about myself or my work*)?

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THE LION WHO THOUGHT HE WAS A SHEEP

Once upon a time, a farmer was walking back from the forest when suddenly, he came across a little lion cub. So, he brought the lion cub back home, gave it milk, water and some food. He didn't know what to do with it, so he put it in his farm with all the sheep that he had.

Time flew by and the cub grew bigger and bigger. It started going out in the fields, playing with the sheep, lambs and its other farm animal friends.

But one day, as they were wandering by the fields, a real big lion came out of the jungle. When it saw the sheep, it let out a huge, majestic roar. The sheep were startled by the sound and immediately scrambled to hide wherever they could. The lion cub also did the same.

As the big lion scanned the field, he was shocked to see the lion cub hiding amongst the flock of sheep.

It went over to the lion cub and said, “Why are you hiding?”

The lion cub replied, “You will eat me.”

“No, I am not going to eat you. Do you know who you are?”

The lion cub was confused. The big lion dragged the lion cub towards a nearby lake and forced it to look at its own reflection in the water.

The big lion then said, “Look at yourself, look at this reflection and see what you see.”

The lion cub, who had been living among the farm animals and thought he was a sheep all his life, looked at his image for the first time, and finally realised...he was actually a lion after all.

I love this story because it reminds us to remember who we are and the power we always have within us. We are all born a lion that has grown up to think of ourselves as a meek sheep.

Unfortunately, we do not live in a society that encourages a person to exercise his or her individuality – and this goes back to our education system.

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“Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

Albert Einstein

FROM SCHOOL TO WORK: BUILT FOR FACTORIES

From when you were in school until you graduated from university, education is all about ‘information transfer and confirmation’. ‘Information’, as in, you need to teach the kids all these facts and skills, and then give a test to confirm whether that stuff has filled up their brains. Hence, the best student is the one that is deemed ‘intelligent’.

From studying in school to joining the workforce, almost everything revolved around meeting requirements. Our education system is set up in a way that our primary goal is to score – get all As (or at least pass) in exams, tests or quizzes. Whether we understand the topic, or are interested in it, or if it is even helpful to us at all, becomes secondary. Then at work, we strive to meet another different set of requirements: goal requirements, assessments, key performance indicator (KPI), competency requirements etc.

Who we are as an individual and how unique we are becomes irrelevant. You go to school, and you have a curriculum that was built for you to consume. You study all sorts of things – vectors, geometry, algebra, laws of relativity and entropy etc.

There are no hours spent on who you are, what drives you, what you love, what you don't love, what's the details and specifics of that, how you use the things you have learned to figure out what you love or loathe.

At work, we train employees to be like factory workers so they can operate in a machine-like fashion and churn out production for someone else.

And yet, we still wonder why people are feeling so alienated and lost at school and at work.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

One of my favourite quotes is by Oprah Winfrey during an interview in Stanford University, where she said, "We are all the same, one way or another. And we all want the same thing, which is: to live our highest, truest, most authentic expression of ourselves as a human being"¹.

Just like the story of the lion and the cub, our ultimate goal is to become the fullest expression of ourselves as a human being, and connect to something beyond ourselves. This is what self-actualisation and self-transcendence mean. Human beings are goal-oriented creatures. And thus, we are driven to work towards a more purpose-related goal that can fulfil that.

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In 1971, American psychologist Abraham Maslow quoted in his book *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*²:

“Self-actualising people are, without one single exception, involved in a cause outside their own skin, in something outside themselves. They are devoted to working at something, something which is very precious to them – some calling or vocation in the old sense. They are working at something which fate has called to them somehow and which they work at and which they love, so that the work-joy dichotomy in them disappears.”

So in school, rather than asking people “How intelligent are you?”, perhaps a more accurate question would be, “How are you intelligent?” because we are all intelligent in our own unique ways.

Thus, it’s our responsibility to become aware of that – to realise and maximise our potentials in our journey towards our life purpose.

Now, where do we begin?