

WORK

and the *Art of Living*

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Blackbird
2008

First published in 2008 by
The Blackbird Collective
Oxford
United Kingdom

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*This essay is dedicated to the memory of the oral historian Studs Terkel, whose book *Working* has been a constant source of inspiration, and who died on 31st October 2008, just as I was writing the final lines.*

Blue Poles

I am twenty-three years old and standing with my father in front of Blue Poles, a painting by Jackson Pollock. He tells me that the poles make him think of the bars of a prison cell into which he is gazing. My interpretation is the opposite. I feel as if I am trapped inside a cell, looking out in frustration at the free world.

-But how could you possibly feel that? he asks. You have so much freedom and so many opportunities before you.



Of course he is right. Two years earlier I had gained a degree from one of the world's fanciest universities. Since then I had travelled around Australia and Indonesia, earned some money working in telephone call centres, volunteered at Amnesty International, and found a job as a financial journalist in London (which was not as satisfying as I had hoped it would be).

I try to explain the burdens of liberty, adding my voice to the whisperings in the National Gallery in Canberra.

-I feel I've got too many choices, Dad. All those squiggles on the canvas are my confused thoughts about what to do next. And the bars, maybe, are my fears about making the wrong decision. They're preventing me from breaking out into my own future. I don't think journalism is my thing. But I don't really know what is.

-You're only young, kiddo. You can try different careers. There's no point doing something you don't really enjoy.

It is well-meaning but bland advice that brings out my frustrations.

-You don't realise how hard it is to be free, I reply brusquely, recognising how pathetic it sounds as I say it.

He raises his eyebrows in the gentlest disbelief. I don't think he can really understand. He is too kind to mock me, but the idea that a person in my position can feel trapped does not make sense to him.

My father arrived in Australia as a refugee from Poland in 1951, at the age of eighteen. He was hugely talented, as a mathematician, a musician and a linguist, but the cost of his passage was that he was forced to work for three years in any job the government decided to give him. As a result, he spent those years as an auxiliary nurse on a tuberculosis ward in a Sydney hospital, helping patients go to the toilet, administering pills, making beds, serving tea, wheeling out the dead.

He worked nights, and by day took himself to the cinema to learn English. Then he did a course in accountancy, using the dark and silent time between ward rounds to study. The day he was set free from the hospital he began working as a bookkeeper for a valve manufacturer. Each year he used his holidays to earn extra money, working behind the bar at an agricultural fair.

In 1958 he was able to get a job as an accountant at an IBM typewriter factory. The company was already one of the biggest in the world and his position assured him the steady salary he required to build a new life in a new country. After a childhood of wartime dislocation, his greatest psychological needs were security and stability. All he really wanted was a decent job that would provide enough income to buy a house in the suburbs, to get married and raise a family, and to give his kids the opportunities that had been stolen from him. He still works at IBM today, after fifty years, and is the longest-serving employee

in the southern hemisphere. And he did manage to give me and my sister every possible opportunity.

But after almost two decades in education, nobody had ever taught me what to do with my opportunities. It was the one subject never on offer.

From fate to choice

My father's working life has been structured by fate and necessity; mine by freedom and choice. This shift from one generation to another is a family history that echoes a deeper public history which has been developing in the Western world for over two thousand years.

For centuries, human beings had little choice about the work they undertook. If you were born in ancient Greece, Rome or Egypt, unless you were lucky enough to be an aristocrat who could laze around writing poetry, there was a good chance that you would be a slave, picking olives on an agricultural estate or serving wine to your master and mistress. Slavery was such an accepted social institution that philosophers like Plato and Aristotle had almost nothing to say on the subject. This history was remembered by the slaves of the American South, who in the nineteenth century could be heard singing spirituals like 'Go Down Moses':

When Israel was in Egypt land,
Let my people go!
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go!
Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land,
Tell old Pharaoh
To let my people go!

The advent of feudalism in medieval Europe did little to improve the breadth of choices available to the average worker. We hear courtly tales of knights and ladies, we imagine monks bent over illuminated manuscripts. But the vast majority of people were serfs, tied to rural estates and the whims of their baronial lords. Trapped in a largely static social order, you may not have been a slave, but you were not free to go to a local job centre to find a new profession. Your career, such as you had one, was seemingly determined more by God and the Fates than by your own volition.

The next step in the slow historical shift from fate to choice in working life came with the Industrial Revolution and urbanisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But these offered an ambiguous liberation from the feudal system. Yes, you were emancipated from serfdom and the fetters of the guilds, but now you were a guest of the bourgeois order, a 'vampire that sucks...blood and brains and throws them into the alchemist's cauldron of capital,' as Karl Marx so delicately put it. With the freedom to sell your wage labour to whoever you wished, your opportunities were largely limited to the monotony and exploitation of a factory job – perhaps in a dark satanic textile mill – or maybe independent employment in the vibrant urban economy as a 'pure finder,' (collecting dog dung for tanneries) or a street-seller of pickled whelks.

The official story is that the nineteenth century saw the beginnings of a new era of choice for workers, primarily due to the invention of meritocracy and the spread of public education. Certainly Napoleon deserves praise for his idea of 'careers open to talent,' (*carrières ouvertes aux talents*), which meant that you could rise in the military ranks simply on the basis of being a good soldier rather than through patronage and nepotism. And the birth of competitive examinations for the French and British civil services, although some centuries behind the Chinese, boosted equality of opportunity. Yet this was primarily a middle class revolution whose main beneficiaries were well-educated men.

Only in the twentieth century did it become plausible to claim that the majority of people born in the West would have a wide variety of career choices and the chance for social mobility through work and education. Women were increasingly accepted into the paid economy, a reward partly resulting from their struggle for suffrage and factory work during two world wars. But it took the arrival of the Pill in the 1960s to give women significant freedom to control when they would have a family so that they could pursue their chosen careers.

Despite a general shift over the centuries from fate and necessity to freedom and choice in the work we do, there remain considerable barriers facing some of those who wish to pursue their passions and use their talents. Prejudice and discrimination are commonplace, even if they are outlawed by legal codes. How easy is it for a woman to become Chair of the board of a multinational corporation, or for a man of Indian descent to rise through the ranks of the British police force? Moreover, the majority of countries in the West have permanent underclasses whose members are trapped in a limited range of work possibilities, many of them tedious McJobs in the service sector. This is partly a consequence of their own poverty, but it is also due to the existence of elite minorities whose inherited wealth and private educations enable them to monopolise lucrative professions such as law, politics, banking, journalism and medicine. American Dreams are no match for the myths of choice.

My father should have been one of the beneficiaries of the new age of opportunity. In some ways he was, studying and working hard to become a personnel manager at IBM, propelling his family firmly into the middle of the middle classes, a refugee done good. Yet I think the war changed everything for him. In the late 1940s he should have been pursuing his education and career as a pianist or a physicist, not scrabbling around for cigarette butts in the rubble of Berlin and trying to get on a slow boat out of Europe.

His son, as we know, complained about his freedom, forgetting not only the freedoms lost by his own father, but the freedoms gained over centuries of social struggle against slavery, feudalism and industrial servitude.

I have never forgotten our conversation in front of Blue Poles. Whenever I feel lost, unable to decide where to take my working life next, it reminds me that the burdens of liberty are a privilege.

This essay attempts to provide ideas and encouragement for going in new directions. The focus is on making choices: negotiating the quagmire of how we decide what work to do and which career path to follow. This may be of interest not only to those who are contemplating change, but also to people who feel contented with their work; it will offer you the chance to reflect on whether your job really suits who you are and who you wish to become.

It can sometimes seem impossibly difficult to change our working lives, especially when we feel trapped by limited qualifications or experience, and the need to repay the mortgage. And if we are simultaneously being tossed in the turbulence of a global economic crisis, change might appear not only too risky, but even indulgent. Yet it is precisely at moments of impasse or crisis that new opportunities can emerge – not only in society at large, but in our own lives. Such junctures bring into sharp relief the big existential questions of working life: Am I really doing a job that expands my horizons and that is big enough for my spirit? Am I working too hard and too much – and for the wrong reasons? Should I be striving for money, status, or perhaps some deeper sense of meaning and purpose in my work? These are some of the issues that this essay addresses.

Before you read on, I invite you to think about the following question, or to discuss it with a friend (there are others that appear throughout the essay):

- **How much choice have you had in the work you do compared with your parents or grandparents?**

Driving off the toad

Why should I let the toad *work*
Squat on my life?
Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork
And drive the brute off?

Phillip Larkin's image of a toad is how many people feel about work. Their jobs too often seem like a burden, taking up most of their waking hours. They are a means to an end, to pay bills and loans, to finance the escapist holidays required as relief from the daily drudgery of the commute to the office, the onslaught of emails, the interminable meetings, the repetitive and uninspiring tasks. No wonder that a 2006 study by the Work Foundation found that 55% of British employees are generally dissatisfied by their work and 80% say that they are overworked, while a survey published in 2007 by the OPP consultancy revealed that 60% of people feel their current career falls short of their aspirations. There are, of course, those who love their work, who are excited by its challenges and stimulated by its creativity. But for the majority, work is far too often a toad. How did this happen? And does work have to be like this?

It is astonishing that the main culprit responsible for the toils of modern work is celebrated on the twenty-pound note. Adam Smith, the eighteenth-century political economist, stares dispassionately at workers in a pin factory. The caption reads: "The division of labour in pin manufacturing (and the great increase in the quantity of work that results)". Smith argued that the best way to increase industrial productivity and economic growth was to divide complex tasks into tiny segments. In a famous example in his book *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), he described how there are eighteen separate stages in making a

pin. If a worker tried to do all of them himself, he ‘could scarce, perhaps, with his utmost industry, make one pin in a day’. But if the process was split into separate operations, with each worker doing just one or two tasks, they could each make, on average, nearly five thousand pins in a single day.



The apparent miracle of the division of labour became a mantra of capitalist economics that was swiftly put into practice throughout the industrial world. It also ushered in the era of monotonous work. Buried in the final pages of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith admitted that the results included not only greater national income but also ‘torpor of the mind’ and a loss of ‘tender sentiment’. He said that ‘the man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects, too, are perhaps always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention.’

Many people today know just what Smith was talking about, for we are the inheritors of the division of labour. Whether we are employed in factories or offices, the chances are that we are charged with performing a small number of specialised tasks: copyediting reports, entering data, practising commercial law, serving at the checkout till, designing logos. Few are permitted

to be craftspeople, drawing on multiple skills to take a job from start to finish. We are denied the satisfactions of a chair maker who might cut down the tree, then strip the bark, shape the rungs, steam the legs, bore the mortices, clamp the pieces, weave the seat and finally polish the wood with beeswax.

But surely it is a good thing that Smith's invention has permitted greater levels of productivity, even if the result has been some tedium for the workers? Not according to Bertrand Russell, who in his essay 'In Praise of Idleness' (1932) pointed out that it was not clear why our society needed so many pins:

'Suppose that, at a given moment, a certain number of people are engaged in the manufacture of pins. They make as many pins as the world needs, working (say) eight hours a day. Someone makes an invention by which the same number of men can make twice as many pins as before. But the world does not need twice as many pins: pins are already so cheap that hardly any more will be bought at a lower price. In a sensible world, everybody concerned in the manufacturing of pins would take to working four hours instead of eight, and everything else would go on as before. But in the actual world this would be thought demoralizing. The men still work eight hours, there are too many pins, some employers go bankrupt, and half the men previously concerned in making pins are thrown out of work. There is, in the end, just as much leisure as on the other plan, but half the men are totally idle while half are still overworked. In this way, it is insured that the unavoidable leisure shall cause misery all round instead of being a universal source of happiness. Can anything more insane be imagined?'

There was an age, only a few decades ago, when there was widespread acceptance of the idea that work was necessarily dull and dreary, whether you were working in a pin factory or elsewhere. But this is no longer the case. One of the great revolutions of our time has been a rising expectation for work

that is more personally fulfilling than anything Adam Smith could ever have imagined.

Some people are searching for work that expands their personal horizons by providing new challenges, opportunities for learning, and ways to use their talents and creativity. There are those who want their jobs to express their values and politics. Others see work as a way of gaining deeper self-knowledge, or understanding of other people and cultures. Many desire careers that are a source of friendship or offer a sense of belonging or adventure. And some are intent on finding their personal calling: a career that provides a meaningful guide to the whole course of their lives.

I believe we should strive to transform work into part of our personal art of living. We need not accept Mark Twain's opinion that 'work is a necessary evil to be avoided.' We must be more demanding of our work and of ourselves, and not sink into the resigned admission that work has to be 'just a job' with few rewards beyond the wage. Life is so excruciatingly short, and earning a living is such a large chunk of our limited time on the earth, that we cannot permit work to be a toad.

Even more than this, if we allow work to feel like an imposition, something that weighs us down rather than contributes to our lives, then eventually we are likely to become bitter. And bitterness has a tendency to erode our wellbeing and our humanity. As Kahlil Gibran wrote in *The Prophet* (1923):

'Work is love made visible.

And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy.

For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake a bitter bread that feeds but half man's hunger.'

The problem we are left with, however, is that the bar has now been raised: more than at any time in the past, we expect

work to be far more than drudgery. So how can we find a job that will satisfy our hunger? And how can we navigate our way through the confusion of choices open to us?

Answering these questions requires thinking hard about precisely what we want from our work. If we go to a careers advisor and ask for a job that is ‘love made visible,’ they will stare back at us perplexed, as their shelves contain no files with this label. Instead, we need to examine two areas: the ambitions we wish to achieve, and the various forms of purpose we might want to pursue.

- **What is your current work doing to you as person – to your mind, character and relationships?**

Driven by ambitions

In ancient Rome candidates for public office would engage in the process of soliciting votes, an effort known as *ambitio*, which came from *ambire*, the Latin verb ‘to go around’. This is the origin of our word ‘ambition,’ whose contemporary meaning reflects this political past by being closely associated with the desire for power and success, and the achievement of goals.

Throughout the history of work, human beings have been guided by their ambitions – specific objects of desire that transform work into a means to an end. The most popular have been money, power, status and respect. Here I wish to explore the contours of these four ambitions, which together form part of a landscape of possible motivations for working that each of us may inhabit.

Money

The pursuit of money is a long-established ambition, and is closely related to the accumulation of other riches such as property and gold. In 1504, when the Spanish conquistador

Hernán Cortés arrived in the Americas, he declared, ‘I came to get gold, not to till the soil like a peasant.’ Soon the invaders became obsessed with finding El Dorado, a legendary kingdom deep in the Amazon that was reputedly ruled by a tribal chief who covered himself in gold dust. The quest for El Dorado has come to symbolise the unquenchable desire for wealth prevalent in contemporary society.



Hernán Cortés: ‘I came to get gold, not to till the soil like a peasant.’



Gordon Gekko: ‘Greed is good.’ He even made it onto the cover of Fortune magazine.

The modern day equivalent of Cortés is Gordon Gekko, the fictional 1980s corporate raider played by Michael Douglas in Oliver Stone’s film *Wall Street* (1987). In one scene, he makes a speech to the shareholders of Teldar Paper, a company he is trying to take over so he can sell its assets, earning millions for himself in the process. Accused by the existing management of shameless greed, he inspires the assembly with a rousing speech that reveals his philosophy of money: ‘Greed – for lack of a better word – is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms – greed for life, for

money, for love, knowledge – has marked the upward surge of mankind. And greed – you mark my words – will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the USA.’ The crowd, naturally, cheers this suited conquistador.

Cortés and Gekko are extreme cases, and few people who desire to accumulate wealth today would go to the same lengths to achieve their goal. Still, for all of those who are interested in working as a means to earning large amounts of money, it is worth noting three characteristics of their pursuit.

The first is that the desire to amass money and riches only became a widespread career motivation in the Western world during the eighteenth century, as the Industrial Revolution developed and consumer society came into being. ‘Entering the consumer age,’ says Theodore Zeldin in *An Intimate History of Humanity*, ‘was the equivalent of changing one’s religion.’ John Ruskin commented on the strange new phenomenon in *The Crown of Wild Olives* (1886): ‘The first of all English games is making money. That is an all-absorbing game; and we knock each other down oftener in playing at that, than at football, or any other roughest sport: and it is absolutely without purpose; no one who engages heartily in that game ever knows why. Ask a great money-maker what he wants to do with his money, — he never knows.’ The worship of Mammon is thus a relatively recent religion, an invention of capitalist modernity. As with all new religions, it is not clear how solid its foundations are, or how long it will last.

A second characteristic is that piling up money in a bank account, and having the wealth to meet most of your desires, is not a particularly good way of achieving what today is generally known as ‘life satisfaction’. According to happiness guru Richard Layard: ‘There is a paradox at the heart of our lives. Most people want more income and strive for it. Yet as Western societies have got richer, their people have become no happier.’ He goes on to argue that once a country’s per capita income rises above around \$20,000 (just over £10,000), levels of life satisfaction stop increasing and sometimes start to fall. Although

I believe that measuring 'happiness' or 'life satisfaction' is a dubious exercise, partly because these elusive concepts mean different things to different people, it is impossible to ignore the surfeit of data which seem to demonstrate Layard's point. Buying a second home or a BMW or a thousand-pound Italian silk suit just doesn't make much difference to the quality of most people's lives, and may even make them more stressed and anxious.

A final aspect of the ambition for money concerns morality. Those who earn serious amounts of money usually do not believe that there is anything ethically wrong with doing so. They see it as a just reward for their own talents, or a fair return for the risks they take. When I interviewed members of Guatemala's oligarchic families, who own most of the agricultural land in the country, they were adamant that their vast coffee plantations were a force for good since they created so much employment for the indigenous Mayan population and so much wealth for the nation. Yet psychologists have pointed out that money-makers often indulge in complex forms of denial in order to blind themselves to the negative impacts of their actions or to absolve themselves from feelings of guilt. They have others sack the workers in an unproductive part of their business so they do not need to look them in the eye. They tell themselves that a secretary who works just as hard as they do cannot possibly deserve the same pay or annual bonus. They do not wish to know that investing money in a second home pushes up property prices so that buying a house is even less affordable for most young families.

Tolstoy may be the wisest commentator on this issue, writing in *Resurrection* (1899): 'Everybody, in order to be able to act, has to consider his occupation important and good. Therefore, in whatever position a person is, he is certain to form such a view of the life of men in general which will make his occupation seem important and good...In order to keep up their view of life, these people instinctively keep to the circle of those people who share their views of life and their own place in it.' This is

one of the reasons why the rich feel most comfortable in the company of other members of their class.

Power

Gordon Gekko was not only interested in money; he also had an ambition for power. He wanted the power to manipulate people, to control the markets, to be ‘a player’ as he called it. He could have turned for advice to Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1532), which may be the first handbook on how to pursue power and maintain it. Machiavelli was clear that becoming a powerful prince would require skulduggery and subterfuge, and necessitate lying and inflicting cruelty to ensure his position.

His greatest insight, however, was that the ambition for power was unlikely to result in attaining the good life. ‘Ambition,’ he said, ‘is so powerful a passion in the human breast that however high we reach we are never satisfied.’

He could have added two other drawbacks of seeking power. First, that it is inevitably corrupting, a point made beautifully in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Second, that those who manage to reach the pinnacle of power often come to realise that they are alone.

Status

Status – the attainment of a lofty position or rank in a social hierarchy – may be an even older ambition than money or power. In China, for centuries, the highest status was accorded to members of the literati, an educated elite who were rewarded with positions as government officials. In pre-modern Europe, those who received the greatest honour were not usually the rich, but rather individuals who stood out as fine warriors, pious clerics, or men (and occasionally women) of great learning. By the eighteenth century, status had become intertwined with wealth, hence the most prized male catches in Jane Austen’s novels are not only aristocrats but those with large incomes,

such as Mr Darcy with his ‘ten thousand a year’ in *Pride and Prejudice* (set in 1797). Today, it is still possible to observe some separation between wealth and status: in Britain, the social prestige of barristers and surgeons is not primarily based on their incomes.



Tea-time for a member of the Chinese literati. The beard was mandatory.

There are two problems with the ambition for status. The first is that we get lured into the bad habit of judging ourselves through the eyes of others. Why should we aspire to a career that society sees as important but which may not accord with our personal values or aspirations? And vice versa – why should we not engage in work that is publicly ignored or derided but which may give us great satisfaction?

The second problem is that the desire for status can easily transform into a craving for fame, where we become obsessed with the breadth of our public renown. Yet it is well known that the famous are often extremely miserable, trapped in plastic lives and superficial relationships, and often addicted to anti-depressants. It is no surprise that Louis Armstrong said, ‘you don’t have no fun at all if you get too famous’. Moreover, the

possibilities of achieving genuine renown are so limited. How many people can become a famous footballer or pop star?

Respect

Most of us can live without large sums of money, exercising power over others, or having a revered social status. But there is one widely-held ambition that we should never ignore: respect. Respect is different from status in that it concerns being treated with consideration and humanity as an individual rather than achieving a particular position in a hierarchy. It emerges as a theme in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*. A waiter in an Indian restaurant, barely noticed by the customers as he takes their orders, dreams of recovering his dignity by hanging a placard around his neck that declares to the world: 'I am not a waiter. I have been a student, a scientist, a soldier, my wife is called Alsana, we live in East London but we would like to move North. I am a Muslim but Allah has forsaken me or I have forsaken Allah, I'm not sure. I have a friend – Archie – and others. I am forty-nine but women still turn in the street. Sometimes.'

We all need to feel respected by others in our workplaces; we all need to feel treated as unique human beings. We need our bosses to acknowledge us not only for writing a great article or building the perfect wall, but to appreciate the complexities of our lives and emotions, and to recognise that we have identities beyond the words on our business cards or job descriptions. If not, we feel ignored, we feel people are looking straight through us, we feel our presence does not matter, we feel like a cog in the machine. And that is when we begin to lose our self-respect.

Bertholt Brecht begins his poem, 'A Worker Reads History' (1935):

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it the kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?

To remember the workers is to respect them.

- **Which of these ambitions – money, power, status or respect – have you been pursuing? And why?**

Inspired by purpose

Ambitions have rarely been enough to sustain people throughout their working lives. Money, power and status provide little more than temporary nourishment, and even respect – though necessary – is not sufficient for our internal hungers.

That is why so many people have sought work that provides a deeper sense of purpose to their existence. Whereas ambitions involve treating work as a means to an end, to work with purpose is to approach work more as an end in itself. Purposeful work satisfies and embodies a fundamental aspect of our beings. It is suffused with personal meaning and allows us to get beneath the surface of our aliveness. To feel that we are working for a definite purpose is one of the best ways to maintain our motivation and gain a sense of spiritual fulfilment (secular or otherwise).

But what are the different forms of purpose that can be pursued in our work? Here I wish to discuss four of the most common that have motivated human beings throughout the centuries: giving service, working for justice, using one's talents, and engaging in a concrete assignment. Compared to the ambitions discussed above, these forms of purpose have a greater capacity to meet our existential needs and to nourish our hunger for a meaningful life.

Service

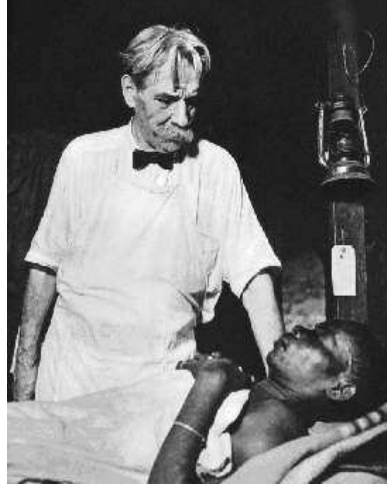
'I gave up my position of Professor in the University of Strasbourg, my literary work, and my organ-playing, in order to go as a doctor to Equatorial Africa. How did that come about?'

Few people today know about Albert Schweitzer. Yet for much of the twentieth century he was one of the most admired human beings on the planet. Born in 1875, Schweitzer was the consummate polymath. He obtained doctorates in philosophy (aged 24), theology (aged 26) and music (aged 31). He wrote a groundbreaking study of the life of Jesus and a biography of J.S. Bach that is still read by music students today, and he also happened to be one of Europe's finest organists. But at the age of thirty he decided on a major change of career direction: he gave up his music and his sparkling, prestigious academic career to retrain as a doctor. He went on to found a hospital for lepers in French Equatorial Africa, and in 1952 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his decades of extraordinary medical work. If ever you were looking for a model of someone who changed professions mid-career and who did some good in the world, place a photo of Schweitzer on your desk.

Why did he give everything up to go to Africa? In his book *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest* (1949) he explains: 'I had read about the physical miseries of the natives in the virgin forests; I had heard about them from missionaries, and the more I thought about it the stranger it seemed to me that we Europeans trouble ourselves so little about the great humanitarian task which offers itself to us in far-off lands...And just as Dives sinned against the poor man at his gate because for want of thought he never put himself in his place and let his heart and conscience tell him what he ought to do, so do we sin against the poor man at our gate.'



Schweitzer, once one of Europe's greatest organists, switched careers and opened a leper hospital in Africa.



Schweitzer was ultimately motivated by the desire to give service. In his case, he wished to serve not just an individual, not just a particular community, but humanity itself. He felt a duty, an obligation, to work for the benefit of others. 'Even if it's a little thing,' he said, 'do something for those who have need of man's help, something for which you get no pay but the privilege of doing it.' When asked how long he planned to stay in Africa, he replied, 'As long as I draw breath.' This is precisely what he did: he was still working at his hospital in Africa when he died at the age of ninety.

The idea of giving service remains common today, but it has expanded since Schweitzer's time, and many people now feel that they should be serving not only humanity, but the planet as a whole and the diversity of life that it contains.

Justice

There was a time in my life when I felt that the struggle for social justice was my calling. In my mid-twenties I worked as a human rights monitor in the Guatemalan jungle during the final

months of the country's thirty-six-year civil war, living in a hut in an isolated village with a community of former refugees. I was in little personal danger, but the occasional gunfire exchanges between the army and the guerrillas kept me awake at night. The military had been responsible for the genocidal killing of over 200,000 people, and it was hoped that international observers like me would be a deterrent to further violence against the rural indigenous population.

For several years after this, I continued my involvement in organisations and causes related to the human rights situation in Guatemala. But gradually the fire, the anger in me, dissipated. I was no longer shocked when I heard of another killing, another torture victim. 'If you are neutral in situations of injustice,' says Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 'you have chosen the side of the oppressor.' Although I felt far from neutral and still cared deeply about Guatemala, the reality was that I was not being as active as I could have been, and my energies became increasingly directed towards other issues closer to my home in Britain.

Many of my oldest friends have, unlike me, spent their whole working lives dedicated to the cause of human rights. They have never lost their passion, their moral outrage, their capacity to be shocked. They continue to be motivated by the struggle for justice in a world of inequality and discrimination. I admire them very much. They have a staying power which eluded me. Perhaps we are all made of slightly different stuff.

Since at least the eighteenth century, justice has been a force driving the work that people choose to do, whether they are in fields such as law, community work, international development, or gender and disability rights. Some have come to it through personal experiences, for instance after travelling in a poor country, others by reading books like Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*. Whatever the origins, justice provides a sense of purpose that ensures you are always rewarded with far more than your salary.

Talents

My discussion of service and justice may lead you to think that having a job with purpose necessarily involves taking up some worthy cause and engaging in self sacrifice. But you would be wrong. Another route to a purposeful working life is to feel that you are using your talents. I discovered this when I interviewed contemporary professional players of the medieval sport of real tennis for my book *The First Beautiful Game*. The top players were obsessives and eccentrics who were totally dedicated to the sport. Most of them loved their lives playing tournaments and coaching, and one the main reasons was because they felt they were using their athletic talents and developing them to the fullest. That's why, when I asked a former World Champion what was the best thing about being a real tennis professional, he was able to reply categorically: 'Playing tennis. What's the best thing about life? Playing tennis. Yeah, that's what I think. Life is a tennis court.'

The dream for many people is to find a job where they can earn a living from doing something they are unusually good at or some hobby they are passionate about. But this is not so easy, you might insist. If your great skill is, say, as a whistler, how could you possibly turn it into a profession? That is a question I can answer. David Morris, from Saddleworth in the north of England, used to work as a cornet player in brass bands. He also happened to be an exceptionally good whistler, and would often entertain his friends after dinner by whistling the William Tell Overture and other classics. One day, while on holiday in the United States, he came across the World Whistling Championships. He decided to enter for the fun of it – and won. Today he earns his keep as a professional whistler, and performs as a soloist with major orchestras around the world. (If you don't believe me, see his website – www.davidmorris-whistler.com.)

Let each of us consider our talents, and imagine what would happen if they could be transformed into jobs.

A concrete assignment

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946) the Austrian psychotherapist Victor Frankl suggested that without a strong sense of purpose oriented towards some future goal, our lives in the long term are likely to lack meaning. His conclusion was based on his experience of imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps. What was it, he asked, that explained 'the apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy make-up often seemed to survive the camp life better than those of a robust nature'? His answer was that the survivors were those who had some future objective beyond mere survival, which gave a spiritual depth to their lives and a 'will to meaning.' He cites one case of a man who wanted to commit suicide, but was kept alive by the thought that he might be reunited with his son, who he adored and who he knew was still alive in another country. A second case is of another would-be suicide who was a scientist who had not yet completed writing the series of books he had begun before the war intervened; he realised that nobody else could complete his work, so he had to stay alive to do it. Such camp inmates had an inner strength embodied in Nietzsche's saying, 'He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*.'

Frankl generalised his observations into a philosophy of living for all human beings: 'What man actually needs is not a tension-less state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him...One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfilment.' This idea of the concrete assignment has distinct overtones of the pre-modern Christian concept of having a calling to do some specific task in one's life.

An example of somebody who found her concrete assignment is Marie Curie (1867-1934). A pioneer in the field of radioactivity, she rarely left the lab in her decades of research,

and was rewarded with Nobel Prizes in two different subjects (chemistry and physics). Upon being offered a new dress, she apparently replied: 'I have no dress except the one I wear every day. If you are going to be kind enough to give me one, please let it be practical and dark so that I can put it on afterwards to go to the laboratory.' This was clearly somebody dedicated to her concrete assignment, although she recognised that its pursuit was not necessarily a pleasurable path in life. 'Life is not easy for any of us,' she said. 'But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves.' Marie Curie was so committed to her assignment that it eventually killed her: she died from aplastic anaemia brought on by radiation poisoning.



The idea of pursuing a concrete assignment that guides our working lives should not be left without criticism. It may not suit Buddhists who do not wish to focus so much on the future. Some people may find that their concrete assignment lies

outside their professional lives, perhaps in raising their children or caring for their sick mother. And it could be that Frankl is too demanding with his idea that a purposeful goal is one which we are uniquely capable of carrying out – perhaps our concrete assignment is to be the finest speech therapist that we can be, even though there are, undoubtedly, other excellent speech therapists in the world.

But whatever our views, we should appreciate the profound nature of Frankl's insight about the importance of identifying goals that we find meaningful or valuable. Each of us can ask ourselves: Do I have a concrete assignment?

To answer in the negative is no shame. But a positive response may offer you the privilege of a sense of purpose that carries you through the years.

These four forms of purpose are not an exhaustive list. Some people will find the purpose of their working life in a quest for self-knowledge or a desire to leave a permanent mark on history in some way. Still others are motivated by a general notion of 'making a difference,' perhaps as a schoolteacher who loves nothing more than seeing a child's mind open like a parachute when they understand a new idea.

In all such cases, to work with a purpose is not to work as a means to an end, but to treat our work as an end in itself. We do it because we believe it is important, we care about it, we recognise its intrinsic merit. That is how work can contribute to a profound sense of being that surpasses the pursuit of ambitions such as wealth, status and power.

➤ **Which of the above forms of purpose most inspires you? To what extent does it conflict with your ambitions?**

High achiever – or wide achiever?

Telesales worker, financial journalist, English teacher, human rights monitor and campaigner, kitchen hand, university researcher and lecturer, real tennis coach, book editor, community worker, carpenter, consultant on empathy and international development, gardener, novelist and non-fiction author, and public speaker on the art of living.

This is a list of the jobs I have tried since I completed my undergraduate degree in 1992. Some of them I did for several years, others for months. Most of them were paid, a few were voluntary. At times I was employed by an organisation, but mostly I was working independently or freelance. Some involved brain work, others were purely manual. Many of them I was good at, but with others I struggled and occasionally failed. I see my working life as an experiment in the art of living. I have constantly sought new adventures, attempting to adhere to Leonardo da Vinci's dictum, 'experience is my mistress.'

I have, in the process, become rather skilled at leaving jobs that are no longer interesting or in which I feel there is not much more to learn. I have never been particularly successful at earning money, and though at times I have worried a lot about my lack of it, money has played little part in the work I have chosen to pursue. Increasingly my work experiments have cohered around something like a concrete assignment: to understand how empathy – the imaginative act of putting yourself into the shoes of others – can reshape the society we live in. Luckily, this assignment requires testing out many different jobs and ways of living.

I have long admired the Renaissance ideal of the generalist. 'Men can do all things if they will,' said Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472). And he did. Alberti, one of the great Renaissance polymaths, was an author, artist, architect, poet, linguist, cryptographer, philosopher, and musician. He was apparently a

gymnast too: with his feet together, he could spring over a man's head. And he wrote a funeral oration on his dog.

One of the central questions about work is whether we should aspire to be specialists or generalists: high achievers, or wide achievers. This issue is particularly important because, over the past century, both education and work have become increasingly specialised. The idea of the Renaissance generalist has been eroded, and replaced by an ideal of becoming an expert in a narrow field. This has occurred for three main reasons. First, due to the legacy of the division of labour, which has divided work processes into small segments, we now only do part of a job rather than the whole task from beginning to end, as a craftsperson might do. Second, the invention of the PhD and other academic paraphernalia has led to the veneration of those who know a lot about a very precise and often obscure subject. And third, expansion of the amount of knowledge in the world has made it impossible to gain a deep understanding of multiple fields, leaving us apparently little choice but to become an expert in a single area.

Clearly there may be benefits to being a specialist. A heart surgeon performs a role that is not only socially useful, but which may bring great personal satisfaction. Yet we should beware the possibility that becoming an expert might make work limited and uninteresting. As Theodore Zeldin points out in *Conversation* (1998): 'We have nearly all of us become experts, specialised in one activity. A professor of inorganic chemistry tells me that he can't understand what the professor of organic chemistry says. An economist openly admits that "Learning to be an economist is like learning a foreign language, in which you talk about a rational world which exists only in theory." No wonder many young people hesitate to embark on highly specialised careers which make them almost feel they are entering prison cells. An editor of *Sbe* magazine has said, "We don't want to be defined by the job we do." An increasing proportion of those searching for a career feel they have talents which no single profession can nurture and develop.'

So even if you find a profession that satisfies your ambitions and gives you a deep sense of purpose, this may not be enough if you feel that your work is not giving you an opportunity to explore your many sides and help you become a complete person.

I am not saying that we must all follow Alberti and start writing poems about our pets. But we can think about the various ways of becoming a generalist in modern society, and whether any of them might suit us. There are four possibilities that we can choose from.

First, we can join professions that require mastery of numerous skills or areas of knowledge. Primary school teachers, for instance, generally need to know about a range of subjects such as science, history and language acquisition; they need to be able to sing, tell stories and draw pictures; they need to offer caring and emotional support to children, often from many different cultural backgrounds; and they need to be thinkers who can invent ways to put curriculum guidelines into practice, as well as keeping the inspectors happy. The finest primary teachers are consummate generalists who rival Alberti for their breadth of knowledge, understanding and experience.

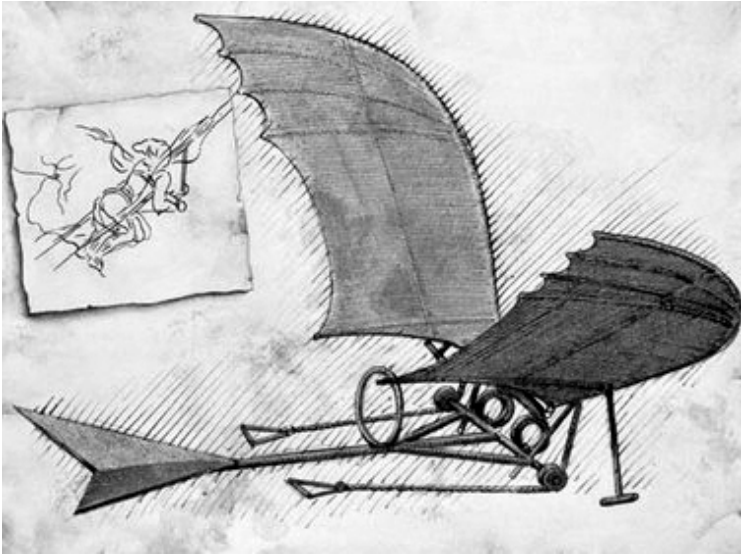
A second method is to pursue several careers at the same time. This may require juggling part-time jobs or facing the uncertainties of a freelance or 'portfolio' career. It is an approach I have tried: for some time I split my weeks between working as a gardener and running a small charitable foundation. Similarly, my partner Kate, although working as a development economist and policy analyst during the week, on the weekends becomes a professional wedding photographer and stone sculptress. This is close to Karl Marx's ideal vision of work, which was to 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic.'

Another possibility is to pursue different careers in succession: to become, in effect, a 'serial specialist'. At the age of fifty you might find yourself exhausted after having been a

lawyer for twenty-six years, then realise that you could move out of London to rural Devon and open a Bed and Breakfast with a small organic farm on the side. Some people I know take their inspiration from Soviet-era five-year plans, and attempt to change careers, or at least change jobs, every five years. We might look to the multiple working lives of Austin Bennett, who has been highly successful in a wide range of careers. Originally he trained as a dancer and was a member of the Royal Ballet. But in 1965 he had an unsuccessful knee operation and was forced to abandon his dance career. He then moved into the music business, eventually working his way up to a top management position at EMI. While a music executive in the 1970s, he became interested in sculpture, which he began doing in his spare time. In 1982 he abandoned the music industry to become a full-time sculptor: you can see his work in the National Portrait Gallery. It would only be fair to mention that he is also a top sheepdog handler and regular contributor to *International Sheep Dog News*. They say you only live once, but people like Austin Bennett show that it is possible to have many working lives, one after another.

A final option is to bring the thinking of other professions and disciplines into your own, so you become a generalist without having to change jobs. Marketing executives often do this as a form of creative strategic thinking. They might, for instance, consider the perspective of a gardener when designing a campaign to sell solar panels to homeowners. Adopting a gardener's understanding of how seeds are spread by birds might inspire an innovative marketing campaign based on hiring eco-enthusiasts to promote the product in local community groups. The point is not to gain enough knowledge of a subject so that you could switch careers and become a gardener, but rather to learn to wear the hats of different professions in order to stimulate you to ask new kinds of questions and to challenge your own assumptions or conventional thinking. This was a strategy adopted by Leonardo da Vinci. Although an expert in many intellectual fields, he was also a virtuoso at taking his

understanding from one area and applying it in another. For example, his studies of anatomy influenced the way he approached painting, and his investigations of bird flight had direct impact on his designs for flying machines.



Leonardo's *Notebooks* indicate how his designs for flying machines were based on his studies of birds.

These four approaches to becoming a generalist show that it is possible to escape our straitjacket culture of expertise and specialisation. Finding fulfilment through work may not require scaling the heights of a single profession, turning you into a high achiever. Rather, there may be unexpected pleasures, challenges and creativity in cultivating the life of a wide achiever, and transforming a Renaissance ideal into a personal reality.

- **Have you aspired to be a specialist or a generalist in your career? Could becoming a wider achiever make your life more interesting or adventurous?**

Overcoming the fear of change

- **Think of a job you have always wanted to do. What are your fears around trying to do it?**

Change does not suit us all. If you had a turbulent childhood, like my father, then you may wish for nothing more than the security of the steady job you already have and see little value in going in new directions. It could be that you are paying off an enormous mortgage and cannot risk attempting a change of career which may turn out to be a failure, putting your home in danger of repossession. Perhaps you already feel confirmed in a job you love.

Yet there is a huge proportion of people who harbour a desire for change. A 2007 survey by the OPP consultancy showed that nearly seven in ten people in Britain would choose a different line of work if they could start again, and around four in ten were intent on changing their careers at some point in the future. But the same study revealed that a quarter of respondents were deterred from pursuing their dream career due to lack of confidence.

This raises the fundamental issue of how we overcome our fears and develop the confidence to change. You would be wrong to think you are the only person who worries about the risks of experimenting with your working life. The fear of failure is a universal anxiety. 'Can I really do it?' is a question carved onto most of our souls. We also have to challenge the social taboos around pursuing new pathways. We are constantly told by sensible friends that sometimes you just need to 'buckle down', 'grin and bear it', 'face the realities of life', realise that 'life wasn't meant to be easy.' In other words, you should stop dreaming of joining the circus and stick to being an insurance broker. These friends might have your best interests in mind, but there is a good chance that their clichés are an expression of

their own fears or failures to break out of jobs they feel bound to.

Assuming that you have identified some new area of work you would like to explore, yet you find yourself anxiously hanging back in the departure lounge, what strategies are available for overcoming your trepidation and embarking on your chosen journey?

Find courage and determination

The first one usually offered to travellers such as yourself is to find courage and determination. 'If the diver always thought of the shark, he would never lay hands on the pearl,' said Sa'di, a wise Persian poet from the thirteenth century. It is possible that if you have discovered that your calling or concrete assignment is to open a catering company, this might be in itself enough to propel you beyond your worries about your complete lack of business experience. But being courageous is far easier said than done. Apart from spending a year in deep therapy delving into your fears (which might make you more anxious than before you started), there are two practical tactics for becoming more lion than mouse:

- *Conversation:* Talk to someone who has done what you hope to do. Ask friends if they know anybody who has opened a catering business then have lunch with them to discover how they overcame the personal and practical obstacles. Conversation, very often, is inspiration.
- *Experience:* We generally think of work experience as something that we do when we are sixteen. Few of us ever do it again. But I think we should treat ourselves to a Job Holiday every year, using a week of our vacations to experiment with a new career. So you might try to volunteer as a chef's assistant at the restaurant down the road. You are likely to discover that confidence comes from doing.

Seek love and support

It is extremely difficult to change alone. Although we live in a highly individualistic society, where people have a certain pride in ‘going it alone’ and ‘standing on my own two feet,’ it is rare to find someone who has successfully ventured to a new destination in their working life without the practical and emotional support of others. The arch-entrepreneur Richard Branson looked to family for help when building his Virgin business empire: an aunt lent him £7,500 so he could buy his first recording studio, and his mother put up her own house as security to meet the £30,000 bail he faced after being charged with tax fraud in his early days. When I began writing my first novel, I was regularly beset by crises of confidence and the thought that I might be wasting my time, but I was kept going by Kate’s complete belief in what I was doing. It is worth remembering the words of the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, who said: ‘To love someone deeply gives you strength. Being loved by someone deeply gives you courage.’ In practice, what can we do?

- *Think about what support you need in order to change:* If you are a mother who has been working at home looking after your children for the last few years, and are now thinking of training as a plumber, you might need your husband to take care of the kids two nights a week while you attend college.
- *Don’t be afraid to ask for help:* Despite what the newspapers say, most human beings are actually very lovely creatures who want to help each other. If you tell your current plumber that you are thinking of doing a training course and would like to shadow him for a day, the chances are that he will happily agree and offer you more assistance than you ever imagined.



Claudine Eccleston, the first woman plumber appointed by Camden Council, London, 1977

Identify your basic needs

In July 1845 Henry David Thoreau went to live alone in the woods in Concord, Massachusetts, where he built a cabin with his own hands and mastered the art of simple living. Spending much of his two years observing nature, growing beans and writing, he had little need for money or material possessions, recording that his total expenses for an eight-month period were \$61.99¼, and that he only had three chairs in his house – ‘one for solitude, two for friendship, and three for society’. He expressed his credo in his book *Walden*: ‘I am convinced, both by faith and experience, that to maintain one’s self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely...A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.’

One of the greatest obstacles to changing careers is that we feel we cannot afford to do so. It may be too risky giving up your job as a civil servant to start a children’s theatre company because you need to pay for your mortgage, car insurance, holidays, shoes, a hundred other things. But if, like Thoreau, you

can identify your basic needs (both material and emotional) to live a good life, you may realise that you require far less money to live on than you think. By doing so, you might have the confidence and freedom to try a new kind of work, since you know that even if it is not particularly successful, you will still earn enough to be able to eat, pay the rent, have the occasional tango lesson, and go on long walks in the park with your lover. Simplification can mean liberation. Weaning ourselves off our consumerist lifestyles is a difficult process, but there are two things you can do to get started on your diet:

- *Conduct a Life Audit:* Track the exact cost of everything you spend for one month. That means everything, from chocolate bars to a new suit to direct debits. Label each item as either a Need or a Want. Then think about how much satisfaction you really get from the Wants and whether it is worth earning all that extra money to pay for them. This will help you discover whether you are making a living or a dying.
- *Practise simplicity:* Trying to live more cheaply and simply while maintaining quality of life is surprisingly enjoyable. You might discover the thrill of finding the perfect coat in a charity shop, or the beauties of camping in the Lake District compared to a beach holiday in the Caribbean. You can become a connoisseur of car boot sales and revel in making your own basic furniture.

Avoid regret

An effective way to combat our fears and develop the confidence to change is to recognise that we do not want to live with regret. As the philosopher A.C. Grayling writes in his book, *The Meaning of Things* (2001), 'If there is anything worth fearing in the world, it is living in such a way that gives one cause for regret in the end.' So many people look back on their

lives and think, 'I wish I had...' Do you want to be one of them? There are few individuals who, when considering their pasts, can honestly say that they were glad to have stayed in the same job, or to have kept working in the same way, for forty years, even if it brought with it the benefit of security. Of course, it is difficult to gain the perspective of old age and imagine the weight of regrets that can get increasingly heavy with the years. I suggest you conduct the following thought experiment.

- *Write your own obituary:* This coming Saturday, at noon, get out a pen and paper and write your own obituary. Project yourself into the future and look back over your life, and record what you did and what you hoped you had done. Perhaps your obituary will reveal that, at the age of thirty-six, you left your government job and started a children's theatre company on a converted barge. Though maybe it will not. It is up to you.

Discover madness

At the end of the film *Zorba the Greek* (1964), Zorba, the great lover of life, is sitting on the beach with the repressed and bookish Basil, an Englishman who has been his companion on a tiny Greek island. The elaborate cable system that Zorba has designed and built for him (with assistance of the villagers) to bring logs down the mountainside has just collapsed on the day of its very first trial. Their whole business venture is in complete ruins, a failure before it has even begun. And that is the moment that Zorba reveals his philosophy of life to Basil:

Zorba: Damn it boss, I like you too much not to say it. You've got everything except one thing: madness! A man needs a little madness, or else...

Basil: Or else?

Zorba:...he never dares cut the rope and be free.

Basil then stands up and, completely out of character, asks Zorba to teach him how to dance. The Englishman has finally learned that life is there to be lived, risks are there to be taken, the day is there to be seized. To do otherwise is a disservice to life itself.



Zorba's Dance, from the end of *Zorba The Greek*, with Anthony Quinn as Zorba (left) and Alan Bates as Basil. 'A man needs a little madness, or else he never dares cut the rope and be free.'

Zorba's words are one of the great messages of the art of working. Most of us live bound by our fears and inhibitions. Yet if we are to break out, if we are to cut the rope and become free, we need to discover that little bit of madness that lies within all of us. When we are procrastinating about whether to change the direction of our working lives, unleashing that madness might be enough to tip us over the edge into action. But where to find it, especially when everybody is telling us we can't just give up our job as an optometrist to work in a bird sanctuary in Norfolk?

- *Seek inspiration from the great man himself:* From now on, at the end of each year, just before you are about to make your resolutions for the coming year, sit down and watch the film of *Zorba the Greek*. I can guarantee that your resolutions will be far bolder, and may even affect your work.

- *Do not submit to reason.* Human beings are wary of risk. If you write down the reasons why you should change your job, they will almost certainly be outweighed by your list of reasons not to change. Reason is a dictator that is the enemy of change. Submission is quite normal, but it is by no means necessary. This may be the moment to abandon reason and put trust in your instincts, passions and emotions.

There is nothing wrong with being afraid of change. But we should remember that change is most frightening just before it happens. Once we accept that we are to go in a new direction and take the first step on a road less travelled, usually we find that we are not stepping into a void but rather onto solid ground that is much firmer than we had ever imagined. Eventually we will realise that it is a pathway to unexpected freedoms.

- **Think of one concrete action you can take to explore a new direction in your working life.**

Is your job big enough for your spirit?

The world of work is not designed for our individuality. The careers pages in the newspapers advertise jobs that ask us to have specific qualifications, experience and character traits. We have to fit into a predetermined box. But just imagine if it were the other way around, with those same pages containing information about people seeking work, listing their qualities, talents, passions and values – and employers were faced with the task of applying to the individual who best met their requirements.

Although this is a fantasy, I believe we should aspire to find work that suits our aspirations and our humanity. We must look at our current work and ask this question: Is my job big enough for my spirit?

If it is, then you should rest content. If it is not, you might contemplate new possibilities. Even for those whose lives are restricted, there are usually many more choices available than we realise, more cracks in the world of work through which we can peer to glimpse something more fulfilling. We need to expand our imaginations, so that if we are a recent graduate, we do not think that the only options are working as a management consultant, a civil servant or a journalist. There are a thousand ways to live our lives, not three.



Michelangelo's sculpture 'The Captive Slave', seemingly half-finished, shows a figure attempting to free himself from the stone. Some art historians interpret it as a metaphysical vision of the soul endeavouring to escape from matter. Others consider it a metaphor for how each of us needs to discover our true selves and destinies, which lie hidden within us, like a figure within a block of stone. I see it differently. For me, this work of art is about the struggle to be free. We are each of us trapped in the bonds of the society into which we were born. Our role in life is to break free and express our individuality.

The slaves of the past had little choice but to submit to their masters. Today, we need not condemn ourselves to being captive slaves, forever struggling to escape from the stone. We have the ability and the obligation to carve our own future possibilities.

Further reading on work

- Albert Schweitzer (1949) *The Primeval Forest*
Bertrand Russell (1935) *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays*
Charles Nicholl (2005) *Leonardo Da Vinci: The Flight of the Mind*
E.F. Schumacher (1973) *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*
Elizabeth Wayland Barber (1995) *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years - Women, Cloth and Society in Early Times*
Henry David Thoreau (1855) *Walden*
Henry Mayhew (1851) *London Labour and the London Poor*
Karl Marx (1867) *Capital* (Volume 1, Chapter 10)
Keith Thomas (1999) *The Oxford Book of Work*
Max Weber (1905) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
Oliver James (2007) *Affluenza: How to be Successful and Stay Sane*
Philippe Bourgois (1996) *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*
Poly Toynbee (2003) *Hard Work: Life in Low-Pay Britain*
Richard Sennett (1999) *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*
Sebastiao Salgado (2005) *Workers*
Studs Terkel (1975) *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*
Theodore Zeldin (1995) *An Intimate History of Humanity*
Victor Frankl (1946) *Man's Search for Meaning*

Films on work

- American Beauty* (1999)
Glengarry Glenn Ross (1992)
Modern Times (1936)
The Grapes of Wrath (1940)
The Office: The Complete First Series (2001 – TV series)
Wall Street (1987)
Zorba the Greek (1964)

About the author

Roman Krznaric writes on creative thinking about the art of living and social change, and is on the teaching faculty of The School of Life, where he designed the course on Work.

He was previously Project Director at The Oxford Muse, the foundation established by the avant-garde thinker Theodore Zeldin to stimulate courage and invention in personal, professional and cultural life. He has been a consultant to Oxfam and the United Nations on empathy, education and human development, and has degrees from the universities of Oxford, London and Essex, where he obtained his PhD. He is the author of *The First Beautiful Game*, a book on sport and the art of living, and of the forthcoming novel, *Message to the Gardeners of England*. He is a fanatical real tennis player, has worked as a gardener and has a passion for furniture making.

For further information and publications, see his website, www.romankrznaric.com.

