

“How do I find or create work that is true to my individual nature and makes me feel good about myself—work for which I am uniquely suited?”

Introduction

We work for many reasons. Of course, we work for money, but that is not enough for most of us. We also work to be intellectually engaged, to make a difference, to satisfy our needs for connection to others, to refine our craft, to be appreciated for our contribution, to satisfy deeply held personal values. Some of these reasons are more important to us than others.

Each of us has our own story to tell. Each of us is grappling with our own unique career concerns. The new graduate wants to know how to discover what type of work is right for her. The young parent wonders how he can advance in his career and still fulfill parenting responsibilities. The mid-career professional is searching for meaningful work that matches her most important values. The recently fired manager asks, “How can I find and keep work that plays to my special talents?”

Yet, if I had to distill the underlying quest for most of us, it would be this: “How do I find or create work that is true to my individual nature and makes me feel good about myself—work for which I am uniquely suited?”

The quest for your great work

Work is one of the most intimate expressions of our identity. Bad work crushes us. It destroys our sense of competence and spills over into all areas of our life. Great work, in contrast, inspires us. It makes our souls sing. It allows us to be the best we can be.

Great work provides a sense of purpose and gives our days meaning. It enables us to look after financial needs and still have time for a life; plays to our strengths and provides us the environments we are happiest in; engages us deeply at an emotional and intellectual level. Great work allows us, indeed demands of us, the expression of all our important values, talents, and motivators.

You want great work. That is why you are embarking on this career journey. That is why you are asking yourself one of the most important questions you will ever ask: “What next?”

What next?

If you are asking this question, you are on the threshold of a new life chapter. The answer to this question will be as individual as you are.

The move you make may be sweeping, such as starting your first real job, making a radical career change, reconfiguring your life in a major way, moving to self-employment after years of working for someone else, or returning to work after a long career break. Then again, the move could be more subtle, such as a shift in your employment status, stretching yourself in a new and unforeseen way, upgrading your skills, taking a lifestyle sabbatical, going back to school, volunteering. Sweeping or subtle, the move you make will have a significant impact on how you feel about your life.

Two key principles

Underlying this book are two main ideas. The first is: be who you are and express your authentic self in your work. Your work should allow you to express your unique talents and deeply held personal values. It should not require you to wear a mask, or repress important aspects of yourself.

The second principle is: be a career activist. When you are a career activist, you expect—in fact, demand—good work as a right, not a privilege. This means, first, that you have a vision of yourself as worthy of great work, and, second, that you are vigilant in ensuring that your work meets your needs. It also means that you will make the necessary moves to find or create work that plays to your special talents and values.

This book makes it easy for you to follow and apply these principles. As an intelligent person, you need more than canned motivational career advice, such as, “You can be anything you want to be as long as you want it badly enough.” You need:

- Information about what makes you unique as an individual.
- A structure for thinking about yourself and the moves you need to make.
- New ideas and inspiring stories and images.

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- Information about how you fit with and relate to different work environments.
- Clear advice on what works, why, and how.
- Advice grounded in an understanding of the demands placed on the contemporary worker and the trends that will affect careers.

In my career I have talked to thousands of people of all age groups and from every type of work. I have learned what people struggle with, where they get derailed, and what they need to do to overcome the challenges. In this book, I will show you how to think about and manage life and work issues, as well as provide you with tools to support you throughout your journey, including:

- Diagnostic instruments
- Guided exercises
- Quizzes
- Easy-to-follow samples, models, and worked examples.

I hope that you will think of this book as, in effect, your own personal career counselor and coach.

Trends that will affect your career

Before you embark on your journey, you need to understand the external landscape that will affect your career and life choices.

The contemporary work landscape poses many challenges that are both tough and exciting. What is tough is that regardless of whether you are self-employed or working for an organization, you are on your own.

You can make no assumptions about employment or income continuity. This means you can never rest on your laurels, and that you must have the mind-set of a temporary worker as you constantly re-earn your right to employment. Work is a constant audition, and you will need to prove and reprove continually that you have the right skills, attitudes, and know-how to be “the best person” for the job.

Your work will be fast and fluid as the teams you are working on constantly reconfigure to meet new challenges. You will need to adapt quickly to master new subject areas, to establish effective working relationships with a rapidly changing cast of players, and to communicate with team members from different disciplines, possibly across large geographical distances without the benefit of face-to-face interaction.

The good news is that even if you cannot make any assumptions about income continuity, you will still have security—the security that comes from being a career activist, the security you create for yourself in knowing your skills are up to date and that you are employable in many work settings. This means not only having the right skills, but also being able to articulate and market them effectively.

Baby-boomer retirements will cause talent shortages in many areas. If you have skills in an in-demand area, organizations will compete to attract and retain your talent. They will offer their unique value proposition based on their culture and enlightened policies toward personal development, wellness, flexible work arrangements, and benefits. Skills shortages are also good news for older workers, who will be courted actively by employers to stay longer in the workplace in some capacity, whether on a part-time or contract basis.

Talent shortages will also put you in the driver's seat. Instead of feeling beholden to your employer, your relationship will be based on mutual exchange—you rent your skills in exchange for learning opportunities and life-friendly work arrangements as well as financial rewards. When your work no longer meets your needs, you will have the confidence to vote with your feet and move on.

Of course, despite the looming talent shortages, there will always be economic fluctuations, as well as sectors and roles in which it is more difficult to find work. This book will show you how to think strategically about your career, in good times or in bad, so that regardless of the economic environment you find yourself in, you can find and engage in the work that is right for you.

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These experiences along your path will be life-enhancing as well as career-enhancing.

The best news? You are no longer governed by a strict starting line, such as university graduation, or a finish line, official retirement. Instead, you will have many chapters, each of which meets important needs, whether it be career advancement, education, pursuit of personal passions, time for family, volunteering. You will move in and out of these life domains throughout your career; smart employers—the ones you want to work for—will recognize the value of each of these experiences. These experiences along your path will be life-enhancing as well as career-enhancing and will contribute to a satisfying and rewarding career.

Managers, human-resources professionals: take note

This book contains fresh ideas and information on attracting, retaining, and coaching the new worker, including developing and rewarding people based on their motivational type, designing work environments and cultures that meet the needs of today's worker, coaching a burned-out or bored staff member, and understanding the skill and attitude requirements for success in different roles and functions. As you complete the exercises, ask yourself, "What are the implications for me as a coach, mentor, people developer, recruiter, and creator of a great organizational culture?"

Create your own path

Follow the path to great work by going through this book thoughtfully and carefully. Use the Self-Assessment exercises to get a fix on your unique personality traits, motivations, skills, and aspirations. Based on those findings about yourself, use the Portfolio exercises as a creative method to plan, rejuvenate, redesign, or change your career. Begin at the beginning, with the first section, Know yourself. Whatever your career stage or dilemma—starting out, searching for work, dealing with a career crisis, or looking to find more meaning in your work—this is the foundation for answering the question, "What next?" Your self-assessment will be comprehensive along many dimensions, including your motivational type, your core competencies, your underlying career themes, and your most important values.

After that, chart your own course. After all, you have your own unique story, and your own unique needs. In the second section, Find your perfect

path, you will assess all the work possibilities. Learn how to think like an organizational psychologist, and about the personality of 10 organizational sectors and numerous functions and roles. Consider different types of work arrangements such as self-employment, telecommuting, and working part-time, and determine which of these is a good match for you. Evaluate other options such as a career change and a portfolio career as the path to finding renewed meaning and purpose.

The section Find great work shows you how to find, design, or create great work by uncovering opportunities, preparing compelling marketing materials, presenting yourself in interviews as the talent the organization needs, and negotiating the best offer.

At some point in your working life, most of you will experience some type of career distress. You may suffer from a low-grade malaise or a full-blown career crisis. You may feel bored or burned out. You may be looking for greater passion. Or perhaps you are struggling to obtain greater balance between your work and personal life. In section 4, Overcome career challenges, I show you how to manage and overcome these difficulties. Different life stages also pose their unique challenges—read the advice for younger and older workers. Learn special strategies for your career stage.

In section 5, you will learn how to boost your career intelligence. Take the quiz to determine your career-activist quotient, and learn how to increase it. Understand how to apply the 12 new strategies for career success in the contemporary workscape.

Now it is time to start your journey.



Chart your own course. After all, you have your own unique story, and your own unique needs.